Food Co-ops in Austerity Britain

Negotiating politics, aid and care in changing times

Submitted by Celia Plender to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology July 2019

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with experiences of social, political and economic change in Britain. In an era of fluctuating food prices, precarious subjectivities and environmental concerns, everyday issues such as food (a basic human need and right) become significant sites through which to offer a grounded perspective on how everyday citizens configure their social and financial worlds in relation to these changes. By focussing on two grassroots, retail food co-ops in London which were born of different eras, this thesis explores the ways in which each food co-op negotiates different visions and values relating to food-based politics, models of aids, practices of care and community building. Within this context, contradictory visions and practices can become intertwined – some more closely aligned with the co-operative ideal of mutual aid, others with less egalitarian models of charitable giving, or individualised practices and values of politics, aid and care.

While this country has been going through processes of reform (often characterised as neoliberal reform) since the 1970s, the financial crisis of 2008 and resultant period of austerity had a significant impact on the nature of politics, the economy and the lives of everyday citizens in Britain. These political economic shifts have done much to inform and adjust the ideals, practices and structures of these two food co-ops. The social histories presented here, therefore, help to contextualise how each food co-op has been structured and informed by the social worlds around them; how their foundations were moulded by a particular moment in time; and, how they sit within the present, at times a little uncomfortably. This social, cultural, political economic and historical context is, therefore, fundamental to how food co-ops operate, and how they operationalise the basic principles of co-operativism.

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Introduction

The co-operative imaginary

As I sat behind the old, wooden counter at Fareshares Food Co-op with Brian, he told me he was disappointed. Over the time that he had got to know Fareshares, a volunteer-run, vegan, wholefood co-op in south east London, he had come to the conclusion that it was not all that political. He was already involved with other activist projects and had joined Fareshares out of an interest in co-operation and activism more generally. Now, he was wondering if he should have joined the Infoshop instead – the anarchist social centre in the same building that also formed part of the 56a Collective. He was sick of hearing about customers' dietary beliefs and lamented the fact that few of the conversations that took place during the Thursday evening shift he had been volunteering on related to activism or to politics. He was also unhappy with the co-op's customer base. As he saw it, Fareshares was a project for elites, offering wholefoods to hippies and hipsters.

I had originally met Brian on his first shift at Fareshares just over a year earlier while I was at the tail end of fieldwork there for my master's degree. This time, it was him who was leaving and me who had just arrived (albeit for the second time). Just as I took on Brian's shift after he had left a few weeks later, I also took on some of the issues he had been thinking about. I regularly found myself reflecting on his words as shoppers shared natural health remedies and conspiracy theories, or told me how excited they were to find a 'shop' that promoted low packaging as they were trying to go plastic free or low waste. 'Shop' was a term that Fareshares itself did not necessarily use, referring to the food co-op instead as an 'experiment in Community [sic]' in which all users were encouraged 'to become active in running the project' (Fareshares n.d.). These co-op visitors were, perhaps, engaging with individualised, consumption-based forms of 'lifestyle politics' or ethical consumption. While these did not necessarily sit outside of Fareshares' own values as a project that supports 'patterns of consumption that promote social justice and sustainable agriculture and [that] fosters an awareness of the political and ecological effects of consumer actions' (ibid.), they did involve a different relationship to collectivity, sociality and, potentially, consumerism.

Like Brian, in those early days, I sometimes felt disappointed – why was there so little talk about Fareshares' political goals, activism more generally, or what was happening in the world? This led me to contemplate the very nature of 'the political' in contemporary Britain, and where its borders lie. I was curious to know how food co-operative activities intersected with shifts in mainstream politics and political thinking, or social and political-economic change; and whether the activities of these food co-ops reproduced or disrupted existing relations and structures of power. By the time I started my fieldwork, the Conservative-led government's policy of austerity had been in place for more than five years. Combined with the aftershocks of the 2008 global financial crisis and the food price crisis of 2007-8, this was impacting on many people's lives, incomes and ability to feed, clothe or house themselves and their families adequately.

Experiences of and responses to political-economic change were always a key theme in my framing of this project, but when I started fieldwork in November 2015, I could not have predicted quite how turbulent this period would be. Key events included the Brexit referendum (23 June 2016) in which it was decided by a small majority that the UK would leave the European Union (EU). Thanks to the Brexit vote, there was also a change of Prime Minister, a snap election and endless negotiations on the terms of departure from the EU, which are still ongoing more than two years later. (Another Prime Minister, Theresa May, has since also tendered her resignation due to an inability to reach a deal that satisfied both the EU and the British Parliament.) All this uncertainty has also impacted significantly on the economy.

Many commentators have argued that austerity, along with the concentration of economic and political power into the hands of an elite few, and the 'refugee crisis', which has seen significantly increased numbers of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe since 2015, had much to do with the results of the referendum and the connected rise in right-wing populism. While politicians such as Nigel Farage, who founded UKIP (the UK Independence Party) to push for Brexit, have gained visibility during this period in Britain, campaigning for British sovereignty and tighter borders, other countries are seeing similar trends. In France, for example, the popularity of Marine Le Pen, the leader of the right-wing nationalist party

National Rally[1] has steadily increased, and further afield various Central and Eastern European countries such as Hungary and Poland have authoritarian governments attempting to return to more 'traditional' values. Less than five months after the Brexit referendum, Donald Trump, a businessperson and TV personality, was also elected as President of the USA. He almost immediately blocked people from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the USA. In Russia, President Vladimir Putin also announced recently that liberalism [liberal democracy] has 'outlived its purpose', praising the rise of populism in Europe and America, while suggesting that multiculturalism was 'no longer tenable' (BBC 2019b). Scholars suggest this rise in populism is 'part of a growing revolt against mainstream politics and liberal values' as a consequence of the fact that increasing numbers of people do not feel as if they have 'a voice in the national conversation' (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018:xi).

Ghassan Hage (2003:20–1) argues that people who have 'lost hope', due to the ways in which global capitalism has changed how the state interacts with society and the level of services or aid that it provides, have a tendency to look back towards older forms and ideas of their national society as a 'passport to hope'. This, in turn, produces the kind of 'paranoid' nationalism that events such as Brexit could be said to represent. Here, he suggests that people who are feeling the effects of these changes can come to resent anyone else perceived as being cared for better by the nation than themselves, and all the more if they are of a different nationality. As he puts it (ibid.) , '[t]heir new life condition brings out the worst in them, as it would in any of us.' And these experiences can lead them to sympathise with right-wing ideologues, 'who promise a good nation' along with tighter controls on immigration.

Right-wing 'traditionalists' are not the only ones to lament the shrinking state, however. Although the articulation may be different, much of the left-leaning anti-austerity campaigning in the UK in recent years has also looked back towards the more expansive state of the post-Second World War era, calling for a return to welfarism, the revival of trade unionism and a return to the more traditionally left-wing values that these are seen to represent. In essence, a return to an earlier form of moral economy in which the state was more caring, and the citizens felt more active in the workings of politics and democracy.

[1] Formerly the National Front.

Here, then, we see a confluence of past, present and future temporalities, in response to how things are, how they were, and how they 'should' or 'could' be – the latter being a mix of nostalgia, concern and desire for something different. Forms of concurrent temporality are also present within the food co-operative imaginary as participants grapple with the structures and practices of each co-op, and of society, looking back to the individual organisation's history and ideology, while also hoping for a different future. Visions of this future can vary, however, reflecting interests ranging from concerns about capitalism to welfare, structural inequality or climate change.

All this turbulence meant that the workings and impacts of mainstream politics came to feel particularly present in everyday life for much of my fieldwork. Like many other people living in the UK during this period, at times I avidly consumed media reports about what was going on in the country, and at others, I felt worn out or bored by the constant political in-fighting and upheaval. I was also frustrated with the lack of change despite the occasional flickers of potential to return to a more progressive politics.

I attended various marches and political rallies with friends from my fieldwork or other parts of my life (sometimes both) during this time. These included several anti-austerity protests and others against the rise in racism and the hostile immigration environment in the UK, and a Momentum[2] rally for Jeremy Corbyn that I stumbled across at SOAS, University of London, where I was studying at the time. This was during the 2016 Labour leadership election, in which he damned austerity, calling instead for increased public spending on resources such as the National Health Service, education and new homes. While I attended these events out of personal conviction, they also offered valuable context to my ethnographic work, and insights into some of the ways in which British citizens attempt to reinvigorate welfarist visions of 'social citizenship', which have become eroded by welfare reform (Marshall 2006; Muehlebach 2012:47).

While all this was going on, I spent almost two years (November 2015-September 2017) as a volunteer-member and participant observer of two London food co-ops – Fareshares and St Hilda's East. I visited each on a weekly basis to become part of their routines and rhythms –

[2] Momentum is a grassroots political organisation set up in 2015 to support Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party, and to call for reforms to the Party.

selling goods, stocking shelves, placing orders, assisting shoppers and any number of other jobs as and when needed. Through these activities, and the many conversations I had with volunteers, shoppers, coordinators and others in the food co-op's networks, I learned about their practices, social organisation, ideals and visions of the co-operative and of wider structures – whether societal or political economic. Over time, as I became embedded in the structures and practices of Fareshares and St Hilda's East, the politics of each also became more visible to me (even if they had not been front and centre when I first arrived). I came to see the ways the political-economic climate in which we were living impacted on the workings of each food co-op and the lives of those that interacted with them. And while this climate may have diminished some forms of everyday political action, I argue here that it also fostered others.

Inevitably, as I started to understand my fieldsites better, to become embedded in their practices of sociality, and familiar with the visions of community they attempted to build, other issues also emerged. This was a period in which the fall out of austerity was becoming ever more visible and many people were being forced to face up to the inequalities that welfare reform was causing. In London, in particular, where there is such a disparity between different people's living conditions, the extremes of wealth and poverty could feel all the more apparent. The changing structures of society, politics and the economy, therefore, inevitably also impacted on the visions and practices of each food co-op as the ideal typical food co-operative models they attempted to work towards butted up against the realities of life in austerity Britain. This compelled each food co-op's participants to envision and enact different forms of aid, care and politics – some more closely aligned with the co-operative ideal of mutual aid, or state-welfarist social citizenship, equal entitlement and collectivism, others with less egalitarian models of charity or humanitarian relief for suffering others, or individualised practices and values of politics, aid and care.

It is the interaction of these differing models and practices of aid, care and politics and the changing moral economies that they allude to that form the basis of this thesis. Here I explore what happens when diverse, and at times contradictory visions and practices become intertwined. In each food co-op, these visions are formed by a confluence of institutional histories and ideologies, as well as the values and experiences of those involved. The changing political-economic world within which they operate, and to which they must choose how to

adjust, adapt and respond also plays a significant part. The ways in which these differing models of politics, aid and care coalesce and (at times) compete can also impact on each food co-op's imaginary – the values, practices and visions of society, the economy and politics that they shape and are shaped by.

This thesis examines the very nature of the co-operative and its imaginary. By exploring food-focused co-operatives and their social worlds, it reveals that the enactment of what might seem like a simple model is, in fact, filled with complexities and contradictions. At the heart of the co-operative imaginary is an ethos of mutual aid and collective self-help, as well as a desire to 'transform the organization of production and consumption through new, democratic organizational forms' (Stanford 2018:211). If co-operatives are **'**people-centred enterprises owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realise their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations' (International Co-operative Alliance n.d.), however, then this examination of food co-ops in Britain, raises questions about ownership, autonomy and practices of mutuality within the model, while highlighting the ways in which co-operatives are shaped by their contexts.

During the lifetime of the two food co-ops I worked with, broader political economic shifts have done much to inform and adjust their ideals, practices and structures. The social histories I present here, therefore, help to contextualise how these food co-ops have been structured and informed by the social worlds around them; how their foundations were moulded by a particular moment in time; and how they sit within the present, at times a little uncomfortably. This social, cultural, political economic and historical context is, therefore, fundamental to how food co-ops operate, and how they operationalise the basic principles of co-operativism. The social world and values of a co-operative cannot, therefore, be disentangled from those of their participants, broader society, or, indeed, their histories. Co-operatives are always context specific and often changing (Vargas-Cetina 2005:246–7).

Through the study and contextualisation of food co-ops, this thesis also offers a grounded perspective on a particularly turbulent moment in British history, and how food co-op participants conceptualise and respond to austerity. In doing so, it assesses the power of the co-operative idea in this environment, as a means of alter-politics, community building or mutual aid and care provision. Food co-ops offer a window into life in Britain: the ways in

which political ideals, actions and motivations may have changed over time in this country, and how these changes relate to shifting cultural and political economic discourses around community activism (chapter one); how the oscillation from laissez faire to welfarism, then neoliberalism have impacted on experiences and understandings of citizenship, entitlement and inequality (chapter two); how the confluence of austerity, inequality and a changing political economy have troubled ideal typical models of mutual aid, equity and exchange (chapter three); the ways in which structural changes to housing and shifting demographics have informed visions of community, conviviality, mutuality and collectivity (chapter four); and which forms of social organisation have been promoted and enacted in different eras, as well as the forms of sociality and practices of politics and care that these might foster (chapter five).

Focussing on food co-ops offers insights into the intricacies and inconsistencies of neoliberal capitalism – a significant counterpoint to the more social, non-profit economic models by which these food co-ops operate. As such, food co-ops, and co-operatives more generally, can be seen as a countercultural form (Bauman 1976), which proposes a different way of configuring economic relations. The co-operative form (including the food co-operative) has developed and adapted in a dialectical relationship with capitalism itself. While the context of capitalism poses many challenges to such a countercultural entity, it has also helped to define it, and the ways in which it attempts to create a protective enclave within the capitalist system, while also thinking beyond it. By studying contemporary food co-ops, then, we are able to gain a different understanding of the ever shifting terrain of capitalism and of co-operatives.

This relationship also highlights aspects of the food co-operative imaginary, the alternatives that food co-op participants attempt to envision and to practice. I use the term 'the imaginary' here to mean 'a constructed landscape of collective aspirations' (Appadurai 1996:31), along with the discourse and practices that go into its creation. As Charles Taylor (2003:27) argues, social imaginaries are much more than simply a set of ideas; through the ways in which they attempt to make sense of society, they also enable its practices, structures and norms. They help us to understand the moral and social order, and where we stand within this and within space and time, i.e. how these orders and imaginaries were formed and how they relate to

other social orders. I argue social imaginaries are also interwoven with possibility – with ideas about how things *could* be as well as how they are or have been.

During fieldwork, I also visited multiple other food co-ops in London and further afield, engaged with food co-op funders, promoters and produce suppliers, as well as other forms of grassroots, food initiatives and community-owned shops. I spent nine months as an intern with Sustain, the Alliance for Better Food and Farming, working with their food co-ops project, which supported student food co-operatives. With Sustain, I mapped and surveyed food co-ops around the country, wrote blogs and articles, and assisted with trainings and training materials. This helped to highlight the many aims and structures of the contemporary food co-op in Britain today.

In terms of the wider movement, I met with co-operative members and representatives, and attended various events, ranging from the launch of a new co-operative space in London, Altgen, which is attempting to 're-imagine the future of work by creating a more equal, democratic, and sustainable economy' (Altgen n.d.), to a conference held by Students for Cooperation, a federation of student co-operatives, including a 106-member housing co-operative in Edinburgh and multiple student-run food co-ops at universities across the country (Students for Cooperation n.d.). I went to various talks and a conference put on by various co-operative organisations; visited the headquarters of Co-ops UK – the central membership organisation for co-operatives in the UK (Co-ops UK n.d.), the National Co-operative Archive in Manchester and the Bishopsgate Institute, which also holds a co-operative archive. In all, I interviewed almost fifty people involved with food co-ops both past and present. Through this approach, I came to have a better overview of the many meanings of the co-operative in Britain today – how these are imagined and enacted.

Fareshares and St Hilda's East

To give a little more context to the two food co-ops I worked with most closely, Fareshares finds its roots in the resurgence of anarchism in the UK in the 1970s and '80s as well as the ideals of the counterculture of the 1960s and '70s and its cuisine. Fareshares was set up in Elephant and Castle, southeast London in 1988 during the Thatcher era by a group of anarchists, leftists and squatters. In line with the countercultural food projects of the 1960s and '70s, it began as a place to buy wholegrains, organic vegetables, fairly-traded foods and

vegan products, while also exploring alternative practices and structures. In principle, anyone could shop and socialise there or get more involved by becoming a volunteer-member. Collective decision-making and non-hierarchical organising were fundamental to its operation and ideology. The name also alludes to a desire for an economy (and forms of food distribution) set up on the principles of 'fair shares' for all (Cole 2018), and this ideal was accompanied by a rejection of wage labour and profit within the volunteer-run project.

In principle, the food co-op operated on the classic co-operative ideal of mutual aid – whereby everyone within a social grouping is seen as both in need of aid and able to give it (Kropotkin 2014). And as Heckert argues, with this ethos of anarchist mutual aid and non-hierarchical organising, should also come a 'radical commitment to care' (2011:188). This anarchist form of care, eschews the hierarchical relationships of giver and receiver inherent in models of charity, instead emphasising 'equality, mutuality, embodiment and interdependence' (ibid. 2011:194). As I detail in this thesis, however, these forms of relationality and attempts at care are not without their challenges, meaning the reality does not always live up perfectly to the ideal and often finds itself in negotiation with competing values derived from capitalist and neoliberal logics.

St Hilda's East Food Co-op in Shoreditch, east London, comes from a very different political era and history, which speaks to the ways in which co-operatives can become folded into state agendas and development work as much as activism or political ideology. This co-op was founded in 2005, at a time when the New Labour government was actively promoting community-based coping strategies as part of the 'third way', a centrist political perspective which so often gets characterised in neoliberal terms. As state welfare services were restructured and withdrawn, this included the bolstering of the third or voluntary sector and an emphasis on citizens who not only took responsibility for themselves, but also for their communities (Rose 2000). Structurally, these food co-ops rarely conformed to the classic definition of a co-operative (member-owned and run), but the name still created positive associations with concepts such as 'community', 'mutuality', 'self-help', and 'empowerment'.

At St Hilda's East, care is also very much a part of the organisational ethos of the food co-op and the wider community centre. This, however, also comes from a different tradition, which speaks to St Hilda's own history as a Victorian settlement community, founded to support

people living in deprivation, while also fostering relationships across the divides of class, ethnicity and gender. Today, much of the assistance provided by the centre comes in the form of 'care as work' (Alber and Drotbohm 2015), through the actions of the food co-op coordinator, Jenny. It is her job to support and facilitate the scheme's volunteers and customers, and the affective, intersubjective forms of care and respect created within the space by her and also those who participate in the food co-op's activities.

Working with these two food co-ops, born of different political-economic moments and the logics and discourses that came with them, helped me to identify this connection between politics, aid and care, and the complex ways in which different value systems interacted in each. Within the activities and structures of Fareshares and St Hilda's, there are important questions about who is responsible for the welfare of others, how it should be delivered and who is and is not included in each vision. This becomes all the more pressing in a time when state welfare (arguably the most significant system of aid in the country for over 70 years) is being eroded. While each co-op approached these questions from a different starting point, both had to navigate competing narratives and values reflecting aspects of the micro- and macro-political, the changing nature of welfare, and of capitalism, and the relationship of each to morality. Within this there are also questions about rights, responsibilities, models of democracy and the social contracts by which these are derived. This thesis, then, also speaks to different forms of power and authority, how these are enacted, accepted and resisted.

The history of both food co-ops has taken place within the broader political-economic framework of the neoliberalisation of much policy thinking and economic practice in the UK and further afield in relation to trade, welfare and global capitalism. As Greenhouse notes, 'neoliberal reform – now a generation or more in the making – has restructured the most prominent public relationships that constitute *belonging*: politics, markets, work, and self-identity' (2012:2 emphasis original). Such reforms have also been through many different phases, in which issues of welfare, public services and the rights and roles of citizens within society have been approached differently. The story of each food co-op reveals aspects of this changing system as well as the influence it has had, and is having, on practices of aid, care and politics.

As many have pointed out, though, neoliberalism is contradictory and heterogeneous, neither complete nor timeless (Hilgers 2010; Masquelier 2017; Peck and Tickell 2002; Brenner and Theodore 2002). Here I understand it as 'process' and as 'experience' (Greenhouse 2012:2), attending in this thesis to some of the impacts it has had and is having on food co-operative participants and wider British society.

In the following sections I contextualise the co-operative and food co-operative imaginaries further by exploring the political power co-operation has had in some past and present contexts. I then further discuss the significance of politics, care and aid to this project in section two, before elaborating on aspects of methodology and positionality in section three.

Section one – The co-operative

Searching for utopia?

A month or so after I had last seen Brian at Fareshares, I bumped into him again at a talk on transformative politics and solidarity economies, in which co-operatives – including food co-operatives – were a part of the speakers' visions of a post-capitalist world (Williams and Satgar 2016; see also Satgar 2014). In Satgar's work, the solidarity economy, which he and Williams promoted in the talk, is framed as a 'counter hegemonic alternative [to global capitalism] driven from below, synthesising emancipatory utopian possibilities while gaining definition through dynamic grassroots practices' (Satgar 2014:12; see also Rakopoulos 2014). After the talk we chatted enthusiastically about other inspirational moments in the history of co-operatives and of anarchism, reminded of the co-operative's political potential and aspirational nature.

Williams and Satgar are not the only ones who see co-operation as part of an alternative economic vision. In their often-cited model of a 'diverse economy', for example, Gibson-Graham (2006:77) focus on activities which can be said to sit outside the dominant 'capitalist economy' in some ways, including co-operatives. This, too, is seen as performative work. It is a way 'to dis-order the capitalist economic landscape, to queer it and thereby dislocate capitalocentrism's hegemony.' In the spaces this leaves Gibson-Graham envisage new 'sites where ethical decisions can be made, power can be negotiated, and transformations forged'.

Inherent in the alternative structures that Williams and Satgar or Gibson-Graham propose is a more 'just' or 'moral' form of economy, reminiscent of E.P. Thompson's classic work *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century* (1971), in which he explores the ways in which food riots have been used to recalibrate the market following price rises, reflecting a common consensus amongst revolting citizens about what were and were not legitimate practices within the market. As Edelman (2015:55) argues, Thompson's use of the term 'moral' not only refers to the mores or customs that people were used to, but also 'a principled stance vis-à-vis society, the world, and especially the common good, with the latter defined both in terms of customary rights and utopian aspirations.' It is this future-orientated, utopian stance that is particularly relevant to these visions of an alternative economy and society and to the co-operative imaginary. In this vein, sociologist Erik Olin Wright (2010:6) has claimed that co-operatives are an example of 'real utopias'. While he acknowledges the tension between 'dreams and practice' inherent in this phrase, he suggests that,

> a vital belief in a utopian ideal may be necessary to motivate people to set off on the journey from the status quo in the first place, even though the likely actual destination may fall short of the utopian ideal.

In a similar vein, Bauman (1976:13) argues that utopias 'relativise the present', and by 'exposing the partiality of current reality', pave 'the way for a critical attitude and a critical activity which alone can transform the present predicament of man'. If classical utopias are 'little concerned with pragmatically conceived realism', though, the co-operative imaginary is. In a sense, it is a means of collapsing the future into the present through practice in order to start to make desired outcomes into realities (Bryant and Knight 2019:14).

In historical terms, the co-operative movement has also been political and prefigurative. The co-operative imaginary in Britain has been tied to left-wing ideals of social transformation ever since the early 19th century Welsh factory owner and social reformer Robert Owen converted his cotton mill in New Lanark, Scotland, into a communitarian 'model factory' where workers and their families had better working conditions and access to education, leisure facilities and a co-operative shop. Owen's ultimate project, often called utopian socialism, was to create a mutual form of society made up of co-operative communities, or 'villages of co-operation', where working class people could free themselves from capitalist

society, living instead in a 'New Moral World' where they grew their own food, made their own clothes, and, in the long run, became self-governing (Birchall 1994:20). Many early co-operators in Britain drew on the ideals of Robert Owen in their conceptualisations of a co-operative commonwealth. Capitalism, then, is something that the British co-operative movement, has shaped itself in response to ever since its inception.

Co-operation has had a role in various left-wing political philosophies ranging from socialist to anarchist. Marcel Mauss – a long-time consumer co-operative member – believed that co-operatives created a kind of 'practical socialism' through which economic experiments were not just planned or imagined, but actually experienced (Rakopoulos 2014). As he saw it, 'they are the strength and the resistance of socialism; they are the means by which socialism creates' (Mauss in Nash and Hopkins 1976:3). By bringing visions of a different political economy and society into being through practice, this lent the co-operative a prefigurative or performative quality (Graeber 2009; Graeber 2014; Maeckelbergh 2011; Butler 2011). Rather than an attempt to completely overhaul the existing system, however, Mauss saw co-operation as a means of change from within, in which reform 'is and will be made by a process of building new groups and institutions along and on top of the old ones' (Mauss in Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010:8).[3] As such, the co-operative has the potential to be a form of 'alter-politics', which works not simply to oppose the structures that it disagrees with (e.g. anti-capitalism, anti-racism, etc.), but also to envision new possibilities and lay 'the grounds for new modes of existence' (Hage 2015:4).[4]

Bauman (1976:36) argues that modern socialism has been 'the counter-culture of capitalist society, if by counter-culture one means the fulcrum on which the emancipatory criticism-through-relativisation of the current reality rests'. The two have evolved together, with one pushing against the other. In many ways, the modern co-operative has also been enacted as

[3] Karl Marx was more ambivalent, however (Wright 2010:235). He was dismissive of utopian socialism, and while he was positive about the co-operative movement on some occasions, suggesting that '[t]he value of these great social experiments cannot be overrated' (Marx 1864 in Wright 2010:235) on others, he pointed out the ways in which co-operatives were still embroiled within a repressive global market (Sharzer 2017:456). Focussing on workers' co-operatives in particular, he suggested that they might deal with the issue of alienated labour, but not with capital. As he puts it, the workers became 'their own capitalist' rather than overthrowing capitalism (Marx 1992:571). As such, co-operatives can be a (perhaps more 'caring') aspect of capitalism rather than always an alternative to it. This highlights a significant tension that has long existed within the co-operative movement.
[4] Although the 'alter-political' and the more oppositional approaches that Hage calls 'anti-political' need not be mutually exclusive (2015:4).

a countercultural form in relation to capitalism, whether as part of socialism, or as its own alternative vision of economy and society.

Despite the co-operative's inherent emphasis on grassroots activity and less top-down structures, co-operatives have also been a common component of state and overseas development efforts in many parts of the world since the 20th century. These range from New Deal America of the 1930s to the Soviet Union and other Soviet influenced contexts, where the collectivization of peasant farmers has been a common strategy (however challenging it may have been to integrate into local cultural and agricultural practices). From the late 1940s onwards co-operatives started to emerge in newly formed Israel, postcolonial India, and much of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Vargas-Cetina 2005:231; see Goldschmit 1978 on the USA; Stanford 2018 on China; Hyden 1992 on Tanzania; Attwood 1991 on India; Russell 1995 on Israel; Evans 1990 on Lao; Stahl 2007 on Ethiopia; Bowen 2000 on Mozambique). When encouraged by central government, this has often been a means of increasing control and bureaucratic regulation of the countryside and its resources. In capitalist-orientated countries this has also been a means of bolstering national trade with other countries (Nash and Hopkins 1976:14). Today, co-operatives are still an organisational form that many NGOs and Fair Trade schemes promote. Working co-operatively in these contexts enables farmers to club together to have more bargaining power in the global market, while also cutting out middlemen (Develtere and Pollet 2005).

In some contexts, however, co-operatives have also been a way for local communities to 'fend off the desires of the national government to interfere' (Nash and Hopkins 1976:15), to protect indigenous rights, or to address issues of poverty and marginalisation (Vargas-Cetina 2005:234). And co-operatives still play a part in contemporary, radical experiments in autonomy, equality and indigenous or minority rights, such as the Mexican Zapatista movement (Juris and Khasnabish 2013) or the de facto autonomous region of north-eastern Syria known as Rojava (Leezenberg 2016). This highlights the ways in which these practices and values can still be adopted in the contemporary period in relation to globalised forms of neoliberal capitalism as much as the industrial capitalism of Owen's time.

At times of social and political-economic change or difficulty, people often feel compelled to question the workings and impacts of the political-economic system, while seeking out new

social, political and economic relations within it. And at these times, the co-operative model, which is filled with both practical and ideological possibilities, has often captured people's imaginations in many different parts of the world.[5] The financial crisis of 2008 was no exception. Rakopoulos (2014:198) argues that the crisis 'rejuvenated interest in the long-standing debate on the multiple range of human economic practices', giving rise to various co-operative initiatives.

A brief history of food co-ops

The history of the food co-operative itself is often broken down into three waves in the British context (Smith, Machell, and Caraher 2012), and these also speak to some of the ways in which political action, models of citizenship, aid, and capitalism, have changed since the mid-19th century. As Mintz tells us,

> Social phenomena are by their very nature historical, which is to say that relationships among events in one "moment" can never be abstracted from their past and future settings… Human beings do create social structures, and do endow events with meaning: but these structures and meanings have historical origins that shape, limit, and help to explain their creativity. (1986:xxx)

For this reason, I take the past (as well as the present and future) into consideration, not only in this section, but also in the thesis more broadly. Taking both a diachronic and synchronic approach helps to contextualise the co-operative as an idea, and how it has been taken up and mobilised in response to different issues. In relation to food co-ops, this not only helps to track the history of the ideals, theories and actions that have fed into the food co-operative imaginary over time, but also the social, political and economic changes that have come to shape the social organisations I worked with, as much as the physical and social spaces of London and of British society more generally.

[5] These include the workers' co-operative movement in Argentina, in which workers collectively 'recovered' or reopened companies that closed during the economic and social crisis of 2001 (Bryer 2012) in order to take control of their own livelihoods, while also addressing some of the perceived issues with the exiting economy and structures of work. Another notable example is the food co-operatives involved with the anti-middle man movement in Greece, which attempted to create more direct connections between producers and consumers, while creating better access to affordable food in a period of austerity (Rakopoulos 2014).

The first wave

In Britain, the co-operative movement is said to have started in earnest in 1844 with the foundation of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, a consumer co-operative shop in the northwest of England. The Pioneers were a group of 28 working class men whose incomes had been adversely affected by the mechanisation and industrialisation of traditional crafts such as weaving – the main trade in Rochdale at the time. Food prices were also rising, and supply was monopolised by profiteering local shopkeepers, who often adulterated their products with potentially lethal ingredients (Birchall 1994:13). By going directly to the wholesalers, the Pioneers were able to ensure that the foods the co-op stocked were safe, and affordable.

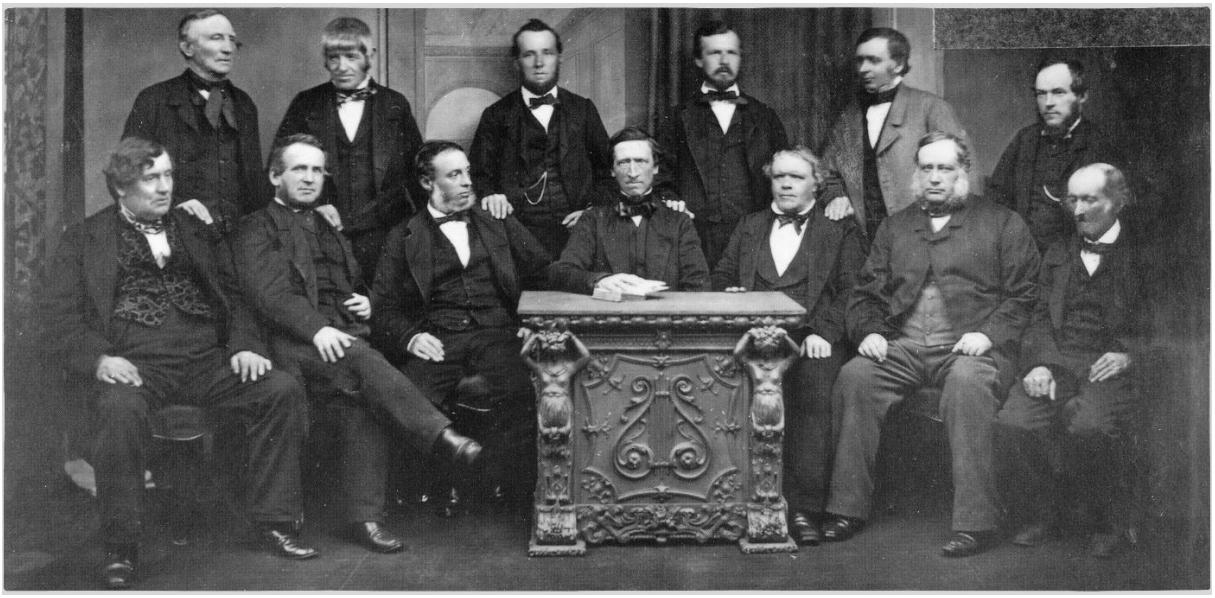


Figure 1 Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. 1844. Source: The Co-op Group Via: https://www.flickr.com/photos/theco-operative/27315913692/in/album-72157641016898394

What the Pioneers did was clearly practical, a means of accessing safe and affordable food, due to the direct relationship with wholesalers, the greater bargaining power this afforded them, and the cost benefits of bulk buying. It was also highly ideological. The consumer co-operative ran on the principles of participatory democracy; open membership; profit sharing amongst members; and the promotion of education. Through these principles, the Pioneers attempted to democratise their everyday practices, seeking the 'benefit and the improvement of the social and domestic conditions of its members' (Robertson 2010:1). In essence, co-operation was an attempt at social transformation through everyday practices (Buttigieg 1995:10). It demonstrated the abilities of working-class people to run businesses

democratically and successfully at a time when they were not even trusted to vote (Wilson, Webster, and Vorberg-Rugh 2013). It therefore created a powerful political statement, despite the Pioneers' own foundational principle of political neutrality (National Co-operative Archive n.d.).

The Rochdale Society proved successful, garnering 1,000 members within just five years. The Pioneers' model also spread rapidly across the country, with some 1,439 co-operative societies in operation by the turn of the twentieth century (Wilson, Webster, and Vorberg-Rugh 2013:138). Although the motivations and vision behind each may have varied to meet the needs of those involved, they were still based on the Pioneers' principles. A Co-operative Wholesale Society was also set up in the 1860s which enabled the movement to further pool their buying power, and to bring more production into the co-operative sector. Within the movement, there was a belief that the co-operative economy could offer a viable alternative to capitalism, in which both workers and consumers were protected from exploitation. This was maintained within movement literature, such as the newspaper *Co-operative News*, until at least the interwar period (Robertson 2010:46–7).

Many of the early co-operators drew on the ideals of the utopian socialist Robert Owen and the 'villages of co-operation' that he proposed. In their own words, they aimed 'as soon as practicable… to arrange the powers of production, distribution, education, and government; or, in others words, to establish a self-supporting society' (The Rochdale Pioneers in Cole 2018). As the movement developed, the empowerment of women also became an important aspect of its work, along with education and community-building. The Women's Cooperative Guild, which was founded in 1883, went on to be the largest independent women's organisation of the period.

The second wave

While co-operative societies were popular until the 1950s, by the 1960 to '70s they were perceived by many to be lacking competitive edge as they stocked similar produce to the fast-growing supermarket sector and at similar prices (Hines 1976:1). Their political and social ideals were also seen by some as outmoded (Gabriel and Lang 2006:158), and in many ways, dampened down. Indeed, flicking through *Co-operative News* and other artefacts in the National Co-operative archive in Manchester, I noticed that while early books, pamphlets and

newspapers are filled with references to the aspirations of a socialist society, over time, these fall away. This is, no doubt, due at least in part to the ways in which socialism played out in 20th century history, which culminated in the Cold War, which was ongoing from 1947-1991. While the remnants of first wave co-operative societies are still visible today in the form of The Co-op supermarket chain, which individual societies eventually agglomerated into, only a handful of those who shop there now would consider the supermarket to be part of a social movement with aspirations of transformation.

Figure 2 8th Day Wholefood Workers Co-operative, Manchester. 1970s. Copyright Diane Bush. Source: National Co-operative Archive Via: https://www.flickr.com/photos/158771927@N08/29022026298/in/album-72157694994156842

In the 1960s and '70s, though, the co-operative became part of a new wave of political energy and ideas. This was the anti-establishment movement known as the counterculture, which became prevalent in many parts of the West at this time. Largely made up of young people, the counterculture rejected many of the cultural norms of mainstream society, such as consumerism or gender, race and sexuality-based inequality.

Figure 3 8th Day Wholefood Workers Co-operative, Manchester. 1970s. Copyright Diane Bush. Source: National Co-operative Archive Via: https://www.flickr.com/photos/158771927@N08/29022028168/in/album-72157694994156842

Countercultural food co-ops first started to emerge in the late 1960s in urban areas in the USA as bulk buying groups. Storefront food co-ops soon followed. Members of the counterculture attempted to promote their alternative, left-wing vision of a 'better' society through lifestyle choices and everyday actions. The means of food production, sourcing and cooking became increasingly important signifiers of countercultural ideals (Belasco 2006), in opposition to the increasingly industrialised food system, rapidly expanding supermarket sector, mass production, and other aspects of Fordism. As well as providing the minimally processed, local, organic wholefoods favoured by many members of the counterculture, food co-ops were also spaces from which to disseminate information about countercultural cuisine and left-wing ideology (ibid. 2006). Customers were often also expected to weigh, bag and sometimes price the goods themselves from the bulk sacks that lined the floors and shelves. While some operated as consumer co-operatives, often run by volunteers on a non-profit basis, others were worker-run and owned.

By the 1970s countercultural food co-ops were also appearing in large towns and cities in the UK, such as London, Manchester and Brighton (Saunders 1975:72). While food co-ops

represented a certain lifestyle choice and ideology for some, as much of the literature highlights (Cox 1994; Belasco 2006; Knupfer 2013), inevitably, motivations for joining varied. These could often be practical as much as ideological. Two former members of a mid-1970s food co-op in Brockley, southeast London, who had recently married and started a family together told me,

Norman:

> The rates of interest were going up and up at that time. We didn't have much in the way of disposable income… There was a financial imperative rather than a philosophical one for us [to join the co-op].

Catriona:

> We were just sort of getting by as it were… It was a tacit thing that it was for ideological reasons. We certainly didn't get involved in lengthy [political] discussions because we just believed in it [the co-op] as a philosophy.

Others balanced economic and political considerations, such as the feminist, socialist group East London Big Flame, which set up the People's Food Co-op on the Lincoln Estate in Bow in 1973. The scheme was aimed at the working-class women on the estate, in response to rapidly rising food prices, which Big Flame considered to be unacceptable, suggesting that 'we pay, while they [large food producers, retailers and other capitalist enterprises] profit' (East London Big Flame 1973). Rather than focussing on wholefoods, the women from the Estate, along with others from East London Big Flame who had first come up with the idea, sourced cheap, industrially-produced foods from a nearby cash and carry. Along with giving them access to more affordable food, members saw the food co-op as empowering women through the reduction of labour, which shared shopping and mutual support offered. They also hoped to turn 'shopping from an individualistic, privatized, competitive process into a shared and co-operative one' (East London Big Flame 1974).

The third wave

In Britain, the third wave of food co-operative activity reached its zenith after the global food price crisis of 2007-8 and the financial crisis of 2008. This led many to question the methods and values of the mainstream food and political-economic systems as part of a broader

'groundswell' in 'alternative' food schemes around that time (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014:120). This built not only on the work of the counterculture in relation to less industrially produced foods, and pared down distribution and retail methods, but also on public concerns about the ethical and environmental consequences of a changing food system and the safety of the food it produces.

Although the industrialisation and globalisation of food have a long history, there has been an unprecedented level of intensification since the post-Second World War period, which has led to this heightened concern. While the 'alternative' food schemes of the 1960s and '70s in Western contexts responded to this through back-to-the-land movements, the privileging of organic production, as well as less processed and packaged wholefoods, from the late 1980s onwards, initiatives such as fair trade labelling became more prevalent. These work on the basis of 'ethical' consumption, whereby customers state their ethical and political beliefs through their purchasing choices, while hoping to foment changes to working conditions and wages for producers in so-called developing countries. This is also a way to create potentially stronger connections between these producers and the consumers of their goods, and to attempt to reconnect the economic and social spheres said to have been 'disembedded' by the emergence of capitalism (Carrier and Luetchford 2012:7; Polanyi 2001).

By offering greater context to food and, at times, contact with the people who produce it, there is an assumption that a stronger connection between producers, consumers, goods, and their sites of production will 'have beneficial outcomes for the food system as a whole' (Little, Maye, and Ilbery 2010:1797). The aim of many of these initiatives is to enact what Lang and Heasman describe as 'food democracy' – a more just food system based on mutuality which is responsive to the needs of citizens, and in which citizens have some decision-making power (2004). Here, scholars also pick up on the idea of resistance, drawing on Stuart Hall's use of Gramsci to suggest that there has been a proliferation of new sites of resistance, new social movements, collective identities and subjects since the 1980s. In sum, there is 'an enlarged sphere for the operation of politics' (Hall 1989 in Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014:41), which originates within civil society. As Pratt and Luetchford (2013:1) put it, 'food has become a focal point for action (and reflection) on contemporary economic processes', as well as a means of practicing everyday politics. Clearly, these visions of a 'fairer' or more 'democratic' system also raise questions about who should be responsible for ensuring that

safe, appropriate, and affordable food is available to all, or that the system which produces it is 'fair'.

Although retail food co-ops have had less of a focus than other schemes in the alternative food network (AFN) literature (with some exceptions such as Little, Maye, and Ilbery 2010; Duram and Mead 2014; Zitcer 2015), they have certainly been a part of this phenomenon. Food co-ops working from this perspective typically sell a range of organic and fairly-traded goods, often locally sourced where possible. Compared to the food co-ops founded under New Labour described above, these food co-ops typically have flatter, more classically co-operative structures. They often start from a basis of participatory democracy; although over time and through expansion, it is not uncommon for them to develop a managerial structure with a core of paid employees making the bulk of the day-to-day decisions. Typically, member/volunteers will continue to be involved in larger decisions relating to the overarching principles and structures of the co-op as it expands or changes.

Figure 4 True Food Co-operative, Reading. Celia Plender, 2014.

The third wave itself is generally seen to have commenced in the mid-1990s and its story is tied up as much with the neoliberal processes involved with the withdrawal of welfare provision in Britain as it is with the alternative food movement, as St Hilda's origins attest. As for Fareshares, in many ways this straddles the values, practices and aesthetics of both the countercultural food co-ops of the 1960s and '70s, and the AFNs that have arisen since the 1990s. St Hilda's, too, shows different influences. This is most evident in its stock as it sells organic vegetables bought directly from a local farmer and a small quantity of wholegrains and nuts from an ethically minded wholesale workers' co-op, as well as the more affordable fruit and veg from a London-based social enterprise.

Today, the term food co-op has come to be used for a wide range of community food initiatives, including fruit and vegetable box/bag schemes, worker- and consumer-run grocery shops, collective purchasing groups and social-enterprise-managed market stalls. Each has its own agenda and socio-economic make-up. Each tells a different, yet complementary story about contemporary British society, the global food system and the political-economic situation in Britain.

While there was heterogeneity in each wave of food co-operative activity, from within, contemporary food co-op activities seem fragmented, and considerably diminished since their peak in the 2000s, as I discuss further in chapter one. Rather than attempt to create a typology for these food co-ops, or identify them as or within a specific social movement, I prefer to look at each in situ and in its own terms (Negri, Tomasello, and Chironi 2017:519). Equally, while the representative of Co-ops UK that I spoke to was happy to include all of these different enterprises named food co-ops in the co-operative movement, whether structured as such or not, participants rarely spoke in movement terms, instead engaging with the individual practices of the organisation and its logics, the forms of desired social change it and its members desired or with specific political ideologies.

Section two – Politics, aid and care

Changing politics, changing food

Miriam Ticktin breaks the concept of politics down into two parts consisting of 'the set of practices by which order is created and maintained', such as national or international policy,

which she refers to as ‘politics’, and the realm in which the established order is disrupted, which she calls ‘the political’ (Ticktin 2011:19–20; see also Mouffe 2005). Food has a role in each of these. As a basic human necessity and potentially the world’s oldest commodity (Klein, Pottier, and West 2012:302), food – along with the management of its production, supply and pricing – is, and always has been, political. As Wilk (2006:21–22) suggests,

> Food has long been a focus for political and social movements in many parts of the world; food is a potent symbol of what ails society, a way of making abstract issues like class or exploitation into a material, visceral reality.

Food provision and access are also deeply linked to the state and its politics. In historical terms, the evolution of civilisations and the adoption of agricultural practices have often developed hand in hand as increased food production created opportunities for some people to pursue work unrelated to food provisioning – including taking on bureaucratic and leadership roles (Diamond 1998; see also Allen 1997). This connection also raises complex questions for any state about who should be responsible for ensuring a strong enough agricultural sector and/or trade arrangements to provide an adequate supply of food at accessible prices to its people. There are also other questions about the circumstances under which this happens, who benefits most and at what cost to producers, citizens or the economy.

As the origins of Fareshares and St Hilda’s East suggest, food co-operatives have a role to play in politics and the political. Through the biopolitical interest in food co-ops as a means of promoting particular nutritional health initiatives, or the ways in which co-operatives have been included in visions of New Labour’s ‘third way’ or the Conservative Party under David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’, they have become a focus of ‘politics’. Nonetheless, as a grassroots response to the status quo in terms of political regimes, the economy or the structures of society, food co-ops can also attempt ‘the political’. As a consequence, there are many ways in which politics and the political exist and overlap in contemporary food co-ops; these can, at times, be coherent and, at others, ambivalent or contradictory.

It is often argued that since the conclusion of the Cold War, we have been living in an increasingly ‘post-political’ age in which national and global politics have become more consensual. This is tied up with the acceptance of neoliberal globalisation and the constraints

it puts on state intervention into contemporary forms of global capitalism. In many parts of the West, this has been accompanied by the blurring of left-right politics, creating a sea of centrist political parties and ideologies (Mouffe 2005; Mouffe 2018). The food co-op has, no doubt, also become entangled in these dynamics, as the discussion of the third way above suggests. This centrist politics and lack of 'agonism' has led to forms of disaffection with democracy and its ability to foment change and distrust of politicians and party politics, meaning that many voters are no longer tied for life to a particular party or ideology (Prosser and Stoker 2017; see also Mouffe 2005 on agonism).

The co-operative and the politics behind it have also become embroiled in the political shift to the centre at times. During the period when David Cameron was promoting the idea of the Big Society, for example, a Conservative Co-operative Movement was set up to promote co-operative enterprises as a means of tackling social problems and improving communities (Norman and Hunt 2008). The leader of the movement, Jesse Norman, asserted that there was nothing left-wing about the co-operative model, encouraging people to,

> look more closely at the Rochdale principles, to which all co-ops must adhere. They speak of voluntarism, personal responsibility, teamwork, shared ownership, independence, the importance of education and mutual support, and concern for the wider community.
>
> These are the active values of engaged citizens - to which we all subscribe, even if they are hard to abide by. And they are universal, not specific to a subgroup of society, religious creed or political party. (Norman 2008)

He goes on to argue that 'the energy, vision and entrepreneurship needed to make a co-op succeed are characteristic of capitalism at its best' (ibid.). This Tory co-option of the co-operative was deeply unsettling for the traditional co-operative movement, which had always identified with left-wing politics (Norman and Hunt 2008; Roberts 2009). Interestingly, after the Conservative Co-operative Movement launched in 2007, the first publication it put out was *Nuts and Bolts: How to Start a Food Co-op* (Coyle 2007). This raises questions about what these forms of centrist politics do to the co-operative imaginary.

Sites and forms of activism performed in the name of the political have also changed over time. The 1960s and '70s, in particular, were seen to be a turning point due to the nature and quantity of mobilisation that took place during this period, ranging from civil rights activism to environmentalism, feminism and anti-war protests. Where the Labour Movements, which find their origins in responses to the impacts of industrial capitalism on its workers, are often associated with collective action and class conflict, these 'new social movements', as they are often characterised, are linked with culture, identity politics and more individualised acts (Sörbom and Wennerhag 2013:454; Edelman 2001; Nash 2004). Following the creation of the 'post-war liberal-democratic welfare society', in part as a consequence of the work of Labour Movements, Sörbom and Wennerhag (2013) argue that these forms of activism 'aimed much of their criticism at the hierarchies, privileges, and exclusions of that order.' They also questioned the nature of the political, attempting to seek out and create new forms and spaces for political action '*outside of* parliamentary democracy and party politics' (456–7 emphasis original).

While some celebrate the ways in which this has expanded political possibility, others suggest that it has led to too great an individualisation of practices, both in everyday life and in activism (Sörbom and Wennerhag 2013:457). Ghosh (2017:128–33) argues that due to this shift, politics is coming to be conceived of as an 'individual moral adventure', guided by one's conscience and belief in self-actualisation. He asserts that many of the moral acts performed, ranging from ethical consumption to clicktivism (signing online petitions), can simply end up as forms of personal expression rather than intervention. The forms of consumption-based political action that food co-ops adopt can also fall into these debates. Some question whether 'ethical' consumption represents any real resistance to the mainstream economic, political and environmental processes it wishes to oppose (Littler 2011:33), suggesting it is simply a form of conspicuous consumption or a way to mark out distinction due to the, often, higher prices of organic, fairly traded and other goods perceived to be ethical (Carrier and Luetchford 2012; Littler 2011; see also Bourdieu 2010 on distinction). Others make familiar arguments about new sites of political action, more accessible to everyday citizens than other forms might be (Barnett et al. 2010). These dynamics and dilemmas undoubtedly also played out in the personal and collective practices and discourses of each food co-op, with the added dimension that there was, at least, some level of collective action at work. Once again, these

forms of action also call into question whose role it is to intervene in the ethics and practices of food trade and production. By choosing certain products, consumers attempt to interact directly with the market in order to make the demand for more ethically produced goods change product availability and therefore practices (Carrier and Luetchford 2012:5). Within such actions there is no call for the state or international trading bodies to intervene.

Just as the character of politics may have changed over time, so too has the nature and value of food. If a quarter of the average family's income was spent on food in the late 1970s, by 2016 spending on food averaged just 10%, or 16% in the lowest income households in the UK (DEFRA 2017). Conversely, where housing used to be more affordable than food, by the 1990s this had surpassed food as the main cost for the average household. It has continued on this trajectory ever since, especially in cities such as London where rental and buying prices have risen dramatically (Hickman 2008; Cribb et al. 2012; DEFRA 2017).

Although London is England's richest city, it is also a place of extremes, containing the highest proportions of households in both the top and bottom 10% of income thresholds (LSE 2011; Greater London Authority 2013). As a consequence, it is a particularly productive fieldsite in which to explore experiences of political-economic change, and the ways in which this can both reinforce and disrupt ideal typical models of aid, care and economic transactions in the food co-operative imaginary.

If the city of London was emptying out in the 1970s and 1980s,[6] with people moving into suburban or rural areas, since the 1990s, the population of the city has grown considerably. From 2011 to 2015 alone, it increased by around 5.7% – twice that of the UK as a whole according to the Office for National Statistics. This is due to a combination of high migration from overseas and high birth rates within the city. Within the same period, the average price of property for sale in the city rose by 47% (Osborne 2016).

In recent years, the occupation and ownership of urban space in the UK has also changed, culminating in a deep housing crisis. One of the many factors involved with this is the way in which housing has become a globally traded commodity. Until relatively recently, this was considered to be a secure investment.[7] As a consequence, many overseas investors have

[6] A trend that had started as far back as the 1930s, but accelerated in the '70s (Trust for London 2016).
[7] Since Brexit, investment in UK property has dropped.

bought in large cities such as London. Demand has not been met by supply, however, especially since the slump in investment in new housing after the economic crisis of 2008 (Holman et al. 2015). As a consequence, house prices have increased considerably and more and more people struggle to find homes that are both affordable and appropriate in terms of needs and quality in the UK today. Cities such as London have been particularly hard hit by the housing crisis.

While food is still very much a fundamental human necessity, requiring attention and adequate provision, in contemporary Western contexts, access to food can potentially feel less pressing than other needs, such as shelter. Shopping choices and diets can be adjusted to better meet budgets. Meals can be reduced or skipped, a common practice amongst people suffering from food poverty (especially women, who are often still the main providers of food and care for the family within normative family units (Caraher and Dowler 2014)). This is, undoubtedly, detrimental to health and physical development in the long-run, but coping strategies can clearly be put in place. In terms of housing, though, if rents and mortgages are not met, then there is the very real and immediate threat of homelessness. While this does not detract from the challenges that more than eight million people in the UK face in relation to food security,[8] it does raise questions about how this impacts the ways in which people mobilise and organise around these issues today, whether as activists or humanitarians; and what structures, practices and ideologies they draw on.

Theories of care and models of aid

Food is integral to the 'construction and maintenance of our bodies, selves and environments and is deeply implicated in ethics of care at individual and societal levels' (Kneafsey et al. 2008:45). Indeed, as Kneafsey et al. (ibid.) argue, it is 'a marker of who we are, what and who we care about.' This can be extended across any number of human and non-human actors from people to animals, objects or the environment (an increasing site of care and concern for many within a period of heightened anxiety about climate change).

[8] This figure is based on estimates published by the Food Foundation in 2016 based on UN data, which suggested that 'more than 8 million people lived in households that struggled to put food on the table, with more than half regularly going a whole day without eating.' Unlike the USA and Canada, the UK does not currently measure national food insecurity, although the government announced in February 2019 that they intend to start incorporating this into a national annual survey run by the Department for Work and Pensions, which monitors living standards and household spending (Butler 2019).

One of the most typical forms of caring through food is provisioning – how we buy, and who for, how we cook and share food. The act of food provisioning can be a form of emotional labour, involving caring and providing nourishment for others (as well as selves) (Som Castellano 2015a). Miller (2001) even goes so far as to argue that food shopping is an expression of love towards those it is bought for. As others have noted, however, the dynamics of food provisioning can also be laden with power, reinforcing hierarchies and differences as much as they show care or reinforce shared identities (Appadurai 1981). As a consequence, food provisioning can tell us much about the 'production of particular meanings and identities and the reproduction of the social and economic system as a whole' (Narotsky 2013:78).

With food co-operatives, this provisioning comes in two forms – the act of choosing what to provide for sale at the co-op, who these goods are aimed at, and at what price goods are sold; and the purchase of goods for friends, family and selves. In the context of alternative food schemes, such as grassroots retail food co-ops, household food provisioning is, like elsewhere, still often performed by women despite the desire of such schemes to challenge some of societies structures (Som Castellano 2015a; see also Miller 2001 on food shopping and gender). This gendered dynamic no doubt also impacts on who chooses, or is encouraged, to get involved with schemes such as food co-ops. Many of the volunteers in both of the food co-ops I worked with identified as women. While Fareshares stretched some of the normative assumptions about who we care for through food provisioning a little further as a more queer space, at St Hilda's many of the women who volunteered were also mothers or wives. To date, all of the food co-op coordinators at St Hilda's have also been women. The act of food provisioning and the prevalence of women in these sites therefore speaks to some of the ways in which caring responsibilities can and often are gendered, with women doing much of the practical and emotional (although not necessarily paid) labour (Kneafsey et al. 2008; Alber and Drotbohm 2015; Thelen 2015a).

Working from a feminist 'ethics of care' perspective, Kneafsey et al. (2008:41–43) argue that ''caring' is a central and defining human activity' that can also have 'radical political potential.' In their view, it is within this relationality, and the desire to make the needs of others as well as selves the basis for action, that its political potential lies. Here, caring speaks to a sense of connection to and responsibility for others – both human and non-human (ibid.; Alber and

Drotbohm 2015; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). By acknowledging that we 'are all recipients of 'care'', Kneafsey et al. argue, we recognise that it is a 'social responsibility' (2008:43; see also Lawson 2007). This also chimes with the co-operativist and anarchist ideal of mutual aid in attempting to create equality through co-dependency (Heckert 2011; Kropotkin 2014).

Caring is also an 'important aspect of moral reasoning' (Kneafsey et al. 2008:41–3), offering clues about cultural values, forms of relationality and visions of society. Indeed, care practices 'feed into the (re)making of social order as well as the shaping of social change' (Thelen 2015a:498). As such, Thelen (ibid.) argues that these practices are fundamental to social organisation. Through their connection to our 'self-understandings and moral sensibilities', they can tell us much about how a 'good life' or a 'good society' is envisioned and practised. This understanding is key to how I view care within this thesis and its connection to the imaginary of each co-op – themselves micropolitical social organisations.

While anthropological interest in care has risen in recent years, it has often been fragmented with different bodies of scholarship picking up on different themes and foci (Thelen 2015a; Alber and Drotbohm 2015). As a consequence, 'care' can be,

> a shifting and unstable concept – alternately referring to everyday practices, engagements with biomedicine, biopolitics, affective states, forms of moral experience and obligation, structures of exploitation, and the relationships between these various things. (Buch 2015:279)

With Buch, I see these approaches as complementary. Within the practices and imaginaries of Fareshares and St Hilda's East, various forms of care are enacted, which allude to moral and ideological values, aspects of organisational ethos, tools of social reproduction, gendered labour (whether remunerated or not), aid and politics (whether consciously or not). In fact, it is the different and, at times, competing practices and values of care, along with the ways in which these become intertwined with forms of politics and aid, that are of interest to me.

In Ticktin's work on humanitarian aid initiatives which support immigrants without papers in France (2011), she speaks to one of these entanglements by arguing that compassion and care have become deeply entwined with politics in the contemporary period, sometimes inadvertently (3). These forms of care and compassion are often a moral response to injustice,

perceived need or suffering. What she describes as 'regimes of care' – the 'set of regulated discourses and practices grounded on this moral imperative to relieve suffering' – have expanded in a period where the welfare state is shrinking. Ticktin argues that care and benevolence now have a central place in political life. By filling in the gaps left by the state's withdrawal, civil society organisations, activists and citizens who perform these humanitarian acts can 'end up "doing" politics despite not having a political mandate' or viewing their actions in political terms as they are 'unable to extract themselves from the mix of contemporary transnational regimes of labor, capital, and governance (10). This mix of moral imperative and 'apolitical' action, as these citizens perceive it, therefore acts to reinforce rather than change the dominant order and the inequalities that exist within it. As a consequence, Ticktin frames such acts of care as a form of 'antipolitics' (19–20; see also Ferguson 1994 on humanitarianism and the "anti-political").

According to Ticktin (ibid.:11), people who fall outside of the remit of state aid, whose numbers are growing as welfare retracts, are often the primary targets of these alternative regimes of aid and compassion. While she focuses on immigrants, I argue here that those suffering from 'food poverty' are no exception, as highlighted by the rise and roll out of emergency food aid schemes such as food banks in the UK.[9] Since the economic crisis of 2008 and the increase in food poverty or insecurity that followed, many food banks have received more offers of volunteer help than they are able to support, regularly turning prospective helpers away. Millions of British people also make donations to food banks every year, compelled by various concerns and values ranging from charity to discomfort with the discrepancy between living conditions in an affluent, western country (Poppendieck 1999). Such activities can be more of a sticking plaster than an attempt at transformation, however (Poppendieck 1999; Lambie-Mumford 2017) – a criticism that has also been levelled at the community food initiatives of the New Labour Years (Dowler and Caraher 2003). Here, I argue that this growth in humanitarian approaches to relieving hunger or other inequalities, which have become much harder to ignore in times of austerity, also seep into other value systems, ideologies and models of aid within society as well as the food co-operative imaginary. Within the changing political-economic climate of neoliberal capitalism, austerity and rising right-

[9] Within a British context, food banks are charitable organisations that offer food parcels to 'the hungry', if they can prove they are legitimate or deserving subjects of aid i.e. they are having significant enough financial issues that they cannot afford to buy sufficient food.

wing populism, co-ops and their participants are obliged to constantly negotiate diverse forms of politics while practicing different kinds of aid and care, which call on a mixture of ideological and moral values drawn from many different aspects of their lives.

Section three – Context and methods

Personal anthropology and methodological approach

My interest in food co-ops has been shaped in many ways by my life experiences, personal politics and concerns for the contemporary political, economic and food systems. Spurred on by a dissatisfaction with housing conditions in the UK, I made the decision to move into a housing co-op in London in 2012. I saw this as both a socially and politically driven act. Idealistically, I wanted to be a part of some form of 'community' in a city and time where such things felt fragmented. I was interested in queering notions of the family in terms of where care, support and a sense of belonging or shared values are sought.[10] I also hoped that the successful foundation of a new housing co-op in a prohibitively expensive city would demonstrate that alternatives to the deeply problematic housing system were possible and doable without having to be wealthy (none of the members put capital into the purchase of the property, instead it was supported by loan stock from other co-operatives and like-minded people). Within the co-op our practices also worked to enact a more direct form of democracy through the use of consensus decision-making and principles built around equality, tolerance and inclusiveness. This also appealed to me, as I have long had an uncomfortable relationship with hierarchical authority. As is often the case with such projects, however, the reality was different to the ideal. There were many arguments within the co-op, protracted meetings and multiple instances of 'bad-consensus' (where members were far from willing to shift their position for the good of the group). While caring about the upkeep of the building, the finances, the shopping and cooking rotas or other practicalities, the need to invest time in fostering forms of sociality built around mutuality, care and fun were often left to one side. Instead, the 'business' of the co-op often spilled over into evening meals and other everyday interactions. In many ways, we were caring for the co-op, but not sufficiently for each other or ourselves as its residents and members. Such an experience will, no doubt, be familiar to many who have engaged in non-hierarchical organising, whether in

[10] Although I would not necessarily have articulated that in these exact terms at the time.

housing co-ops, activist networks (see, for example, Freeman 1972; Graeber 2009) or food co-ops. All in all, this did not make for a particularly relaxing living situation. Although I chose to leave the housing co-op, I did not feel that I had fully satisfied my interest in co-operatives, their structures and principles, either personally or academically.

As a consequence of this personal interest in co-operatives and my concerns about aspect of the mainstream political-economic and food systems, I characterise my project as an engaged form of anthropology. This is reflective of my shared interest in and commitment to aspects of food co-operatives' visions of social justice and social change (Low and Merry 2010:S208), although these can, admittedly, vary considerably. Engaged anthropology can work on various registers, ranging from sharing and support to collaboration, advocacy or activism, and some of these may be more subtle than others (Low and Merry 2010). I choose the term 'engaged' over others such as 'activist' (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003) or 'militant' (Scheper-Hughes 1995) anthropology as I feel it leaves more space for the subtleties and complexities of ethnographic engagement, and the ways in which my own ethics and positionality may not have always perfectly align with those of my research participants (just as each of theirs may not align with each other's) despite my desire to take a supportive approach, which attempted solidarity. Through my ethnographic work, I also engage with some forms of social critique by 'study up' as well as studying down in order to highlight the ways in which macroeconomic and political factors impacted the microsocial spaces in which I worked during a politically turbulent period (Low and Merry 2010), which saw many harsh consequences of austerity and welfare reform. As Lyon-Callo and Hyatt (2003:177–9) suggest, studying localities 'from below' can be a way of ''ethnographizing' and therefore demystifying' wider structures, such as neoliberal state practices, and the ways in which these and processes of globalisation can impact grassroots attempts at social change.

Identifying with a spirit of mutual aid or what geographer Victoria Lawson describes as 'a feminist ethic of care', I have attempted to acknowledge in this work and in the way I conducted my fieldwork that we *all* need care and also give it (Lawson 2007:3; see also Tronto 1993). In other words, we all have our vulnerabilities (O'Neill 2018) and interdependencies (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017:4). In this vein, I attempted to be open about my own vulnerabilities in my fieldwork while also trying to acknowledge those of others through the care I offered

and received as a volunteer, a colleague, friend or ethnographer, and now through the ways in which I represent the people and the organisations I worked with.

My previous experience with co-operatives and my knowledge of food co-ops as well as food (as a former chef, food writer and student of the anthropology of food) were often useful in terms of gaining access to the various food co-ops, charities and food projects, I worked with. Many of them had a sense of how I could be of use to them, sharing knowledge or making other practical contributions to the organisation, as well as putting in regular hours as a volunteer. As Juris and Khasnabish (2013:4) highlight, such forms of knowledge, practice and positionality are not only important for access,[11] but also 'provide engaged ethnographers with critical purchase on key tensions and issues underlying processes and events'. And at times, these critical understandings have the potential to be fed into strategies for overcoming issues. As such, any critique in this thesis of the structures and practices of the food co-ops that I worked with comes not from a desire to criticise or judge their operations. Instead, I hope that this can feed into reflections on modes of organisation and the ways in which political energies can be diverted or diluted. During my fieldwork, I was happy to be in a position where I might be able to give something back to the sites where I worked, whether as a volunteer who could be relied on to turn up each week, or by taking on additional jobs such as cookery workshops, doing what I could to promote each food co-op in wider circles or sharing knowledge about practices I had seen elsewhere. Of course, each of these jobs also helped me to better understand the context of the social spaces I was working in.

As a researcher, I was keen to position myself as a collaborator and a volunteer-member, bringing what I could to each project in terms of skills, knowledge and personal values, not as an 'expert' of any kind, but in the way that any other volunteer would. I tried only to offer advice or share experiences when asked or where it made sense within the situation – such as a co-op meeting. While I was honest about my opinions on anything from mainstream politics or current affairs to the workings of the food co-op when topics such as these came

[11] Here, Juris and Khasnabish frame this as 'activist engagements' (2013:4). I do not claim that the everyday, political acts I performed as part of my life or consumption choices (such as living in a co-operative or living collectively, or being part of a buying club that worked with wholesale and producer co-ops), gave me an activist identity. They have altered by knowledge, skills and subjectivity though, all of which impacted the ways in which I understood and engaged with my key fieldsites.

up, I also attempted to make it clear that I was interested in listening to and learning from others within each space as well as contributing as a volunteer.

As a consequence of my stance on engagement, and the nature of the organisations I worked with, at times I was very much an 'observing participant' (Kadir 2016; Graeber 2009) who actively fed into the decision-making practices of each food co-op and therefore shaped the spaces in which I worked. In line with 'an ethic of openness and flexibility' (Juris and Khasnabish 2013:9), the ethnographic process, which itself can be a transformative experience, also shaped me in many ways (Malkki 2015:12). This more active form of 'observing participation' was an important tool in fully understanding what it meant and felt like – practically, physically and affectively – to be a volunteer-member of Fareshares and St Hilda's East. I felt that this approach was necessary to fully understand the practices, ideology and social imaginary of each food co-op, as well as how it felt to care and be cared for in these spaces. At times, when a situation appeared to be ethnographically rich, I also tried to allow others to take the lead, however, provided that this did not put additional pressure on them or create an awkward situation. This allowed me to better understand the logics and decision-making processes within each space.

At Fareshares, in particular, a project attempting non-hierarchical organising and consensus decision making, being an observing participant proved instrumental in my understanding of the structures and hierarchies within the food co-op – even as I became embroiled in them. I did not jump into this too quickly though, choosing to become acquainted with the shifts I worked and the dynamics of the meetings before taking an active role in them. It was also when I started participating in these meetings at Fareshares that I started to better understand the meaning of 'the political' there. This echoes Graeber's suggestion that meetings in grassroots organisations are 'pure zones of social experiment, spaces in which activists can treat one another as they feel people ought to treat each other, and to begin to create something of the social world they wish to bring out' (Graeber 2009:287). Through the decision-making practices enacted there, the collective attempted to foster certain kinds of 'direct relationships' and structures, which Heckert would characterise as already existing anarchism (Heckert 2011:190–191). At Fareshares, I often ended up taking the minutes for the meetings. This was part choice and part circumstance as I always had a notebook with

me. Nonetheless, it enabled me to both participate, while performing a useful role, and to observe and take notes.

As Graeber (2009:22–2) points out,

> If anarchism [and I would extend this further to also say co-operativism] is not an attempt to put a certain sort of theoretical vision into practice, but is instead a constant mutual exchange between inspirational visions, anti-authoritarian attitudes, and egalitarian practices, it's easy to see how ethnography could become such an appropriate tool for its analysis. This is precisely what ethnography is supposed to do: tease out the implicit logic in a way of life, along with its related myths and rituals, to grasp the sense of a set of practices.

In terms of my interest in 'the political', ethnography also proved a useful method. It was one by which I was able to take in 'everyday practices, cultural imaginaries, and emerging subjectivities' as well as the 'complexity, contingency, and transformational potential' of the everyday actions of each food co-op (Juris and Khasnabish 2013:6).

As others have noted, over time, as I established myself as a volunteer in each food co-op and developed close friendships there, my identity as a researcher could be forgotten or the boundaries between what was discussed as part of research or as part of human interaction and bonding could become blurred. Inevitably, this makes the process of informed consent less clear cut (see, for example, Koch 2018:24). Nonetheless, I tried to do what I could to counter the potential ethical impacts of this by periodically reminding people of my work as a researcher. I also had conversations with those that I was closest to about what was and was not on the record and about issues of representation – some of these were initiated by me, some by them, some at the time and others after my fieldwork concluded. I also saved most of the semi-structured interviews I conducted with participants at Fareshares and St Hilda's until the end of my fieldwork so that I could bring up issues we had discussed during my time with each co-op in a more formalised setting – allowing my interlocutors to decide how they wanted to put certain events and conversations on the record. I also made parts of these interviews more conversational spaces in which I shared some of my thoughts about experiences of the food co-ops too, giving my interlocutors the chance to consider and

respond to how my ideas and understanding were shaping up in the spirit of a more dialogical form of reflexivity.

With these same research participants, I grounded the interviews in a life story approach in order to better understand the trajectory of their own political ideologies, practices and personal values. This not only helped to understand what brought them to the food co-ops, but also how their ideologies, aspirations and perceptions of society and the food system correlated and differed from that of the food co-op itself. This helped to highlight the ways in which personal concerns are borne out (or not) in the practices, structures, goods, and physical/social spaces of each co-op. As Russell (2012:133) argues, life story interviews allow the 'interviewees [to] define their own terms of reference and meaning' opening up more opportunities to understand their frames of perception, social imaginaries and the forms of morality that shape them.

While I name many of the sites I worked with, in particular St Hilda's and Fareshares, and the managerial figures within the former, such as the director and coordinators, I use pseudonyms and, at times, anonymisation for the other people involved with each co-op, unless they expressly gave consent for their names to be used in this research. When discussing contentious issues, I sometimes still use pseudonyms and anonymisation in order to protect my research participant's privacy, dignity or social relations within each co-op.

The sites

Before embarking on this research, I was already familiar with the areas where the two food co-ops I worked with are situated – Elephant and Castle and Bethnal Green/Shoreditch. I grew up just to the south of Elephant (as locals often call it) in areas called Herne Hill and Camberwell, and regularly passed through there in my youth. I also lived in Elephant and Castle for around a year in my mid-twenties, just a three minute walk from Fareshares on the twelfth floor of a council-built high rise that overlooked the sprawling multiple roundabout at the area's centre. This offered amazing views of the city, as well as some of the redevelopment work that was already underway there in the mid-2000s – an issue I discuss further in chapter four.

Although Fareshares' story was playing out so close to my own, I never came across it at this time. Instead, I was first introduced to the food co-op by a flatmate of mine who bought a lot

of wholegrains and privileged organic and fairly-traded goods in terms of his consumption choices. I had recently moved out of the housing co-op where we had bought in bulk from wholefood co-operatives in order to attempt to source our food more sustainably and ethically. I had also just started studying for a Masters in the Anthropology of Food. So, he suggested I might be interested in visiting the place where he went for his pulses.

Figure 5 Bikespace sign. Celia Plender, 2016.

The first time I did try to visit with a couple of our other housemates, we checked the Saturday opening hours, travelled the hour or so south from Clapton in East London where we lived only to find the food co-op was closed. Round the side of the building, various people were mending bikes as part of the DIY bike repair project, which is part of the same collective as Fareshares. Next to them was a green 'cycles' sign, in which the white circle at its centre, containing a bicycle, had been masked out to create the anarchist symbol. We asked them if they knew what was going on with Fareshares and they told us that if it was not open, it probably meant none of the Saturday volunteers had turned up. A little disappointed by this, we decided to go for a cup of tea instead at the Electric Elephant café a few doors down. We drank this on the benches outside with a view of Illife Yard, one of the workshop spaces built as part of the Victorian estate on which Fareshares is located. I did not manage to go back to

Fareshares again until I started fieldwork there for my dissertation for the masters. My first shift was also on a Saturday. I build on the work I did for that and my subsequent dissertation for a Masters in Anthropological Research Methods (both at SOAS, University of London) in this thesis.

One thing that particularly struck me that day was the difference between the transactions that took place there and those of a 'normal' shop. The volunteer who I was shadowing sat back on a stool for much of the shift, talking to shoppers when he felt like it, but without the formalised efforts of a service arrangement. He was not unfriendly, but nor did he make a particular effort to help shoppers or appear friendly as he took the money for their purchases. This is something that led me to reflect on how I wished to be in the space, and whether I wanted to unlearn some of the service practices that came naturally to me from previous retail work in the spirit of contesting the practices of more consumerist economic transactions. Each volunteer seemed to make slightly different choices here based on anything from ideals to personalities. In my own case, I tried to be friendly, helped when shoppers needed it, but tried not to be overly attentive or service orientated.

As for St Hilda's, I also lived within walking distance of the community centre for a brief period in my mid-twenties, although this time the walk was longer than in Elephant. I then got to know East London better, living in Hackney, Clapton and Walthamstow in my late twenties and for much of my thirties. During this time, I often visited the area around Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Spitalfields and Brick Lane, in which St Hilda's is located, for leisure and latterly for work as a restaurant critic. I did not know St Hilda's itself, although I had reviewed cafés in the surrounding streets.

My second visit to St Hilda's highlighted the contrast between this world of middle-class leisure pursuits and that of the centre. Having done my initial induction the day before with the volunteer co-ordinator and got permission from Jenny, the food co-op coordinator, to start fieldwork with them, I was invited back for a visit to a local chocolatier that all of the volunteers in the centre had been given the opportunity to attend. The shop was two roads away from the community centre and almost every shop on that street looked as if it would fly the flag for 'artisanal' or 'boutique' goods of some kind. At the minimalist chocolate shop we visited, a 28 gram bar of chocolate cost four pounds and a 100 gram bar was seven. As we

entered, we were each offered a piece of dark chocolate infused with the flavour of smoke. From the chocolate shop's perspective, this was a highly-refined and on-trend item, displaying all of the 'cultural capital' that comes with dark chocolate for the typically affluent, middle-class customers that they were used to, who no doubt prided themselves on their refined palates (Terrio 1996:72). Many of the volunteers had mixed feelings about these tasters, and as we left, I noticed that one piece had been dropped discreetly into a corner of the shop. As many of the volunteers acknowledged, they preferred milk chocolate, and even the milk tasters they tried here were not entirely to their liking.

I often found myself thinking back to this as we tucked into boxes of Cadbury Roses, Celebrations (made by Mars) or other more industrially produced milk chocolates to celebrate various occasions ranging from birthdays and leaving dos to Christmas or the Eid celebrations at the end of Ramadan. Each box, which was typically provided by Jenny, the food co-op coordinator, would have cost little more than a pound per 100 grams. They always went down very well.

By the time I, and most of the other volunteers who did the standard 10am-1pm volunteer shift at the food co-op, arrived at St Hilda's on a Thursday morning, Arpan, the longest-running volunteer and often the only man, and Jenny would already be there. The folding tables would be set out, the wipeable tablecloths on and the till in place, all jobs that Arpan often helped with. In the latter half of my fieldwork, Nazma and Rana would be there too, setting out the organic fruits and vegetables from Sarah Green Organics and the dried goods from Suma and Zaytoun. Sometimes the delivery from Community Food Enterprise would already be there too, other days it would arrive shortly after I did. Then, either Jenny or one of the volunteers would count and sign off the fruit and veg. These were then arranged as attractively as possible into wicker baskets on the central tables. Once everything had been unpacked, arranged and priced up, the final touch for the central table was a selection of laminated cards with information about where the produce came from, as well as the nutritional properties of some of the fruits and vegetables. While some volunteers were working on this, others would fill up the hot water pitchers and arrange the tea and coffee area so that anyone who wanted to could help themselves. Once everything was ready, Arpan got the cash float from the admin office and put the food co-op sign out. Nazma and Rana then did their shopping before heading home at 11.30am to look after household, chores and children. The rest of us

put on our food co-op aprons, discussed who would start off with which jobs and got ready to attend to the customers who would soon be filling the space. Depending on how many volunteers were there that day (the numbers could vary considerably from as few as one volunteer to as many as ten), two or three would work behind the till, weighing, ringing up and packing the goods while the others would help customers with their shopping – carrying baskets for the Older People or pushing their wheelchairs, as well as answering customer queries and ensuring that the table looked orderly as the quantity of produce went down.

Here too, the interactions with customers, and between volunteers was a little different to the average shop. Many of the customers were familiar faces who came most weeks as they either lived and worked in the local area, or came in to use the various services in the centre; we got to know many of their names, and chatted with them. At times, we exchanged hugs or kisses in greeting as well as niceties, attending as much as we could to their shopping needs in a spirit of sociality and good customer service. For some, this meant wheeling their wheelchairs round, or carrying their basket; for others, answering questions or having a chat.

The routine

The first hour from 11am until midday at St Hilda's could often be very busy as the Older People's Project members, the chef of their lunch club and various regular customers all tended to arrive promptly – in the case of the older people, sometimes too promptly as some of them had a tendency to pop in as soon as they arrived in the centre's mini-bus 'Ethel' around 10.30am. Jenny always tried to ensure that the most confident till users were ringing things through for the first half hour or so, and jumped in herself when needed, as the queues could get pretty long. While most of the customers were very patient, the odd one might get a little irritable, and no one wanted to keep the older people waiting in line for too long. Doing their own shopping, though, was seen as an important activity, so they were encouraged to come through themselves, accompanied if needed, rather than simply give us a shopping list. Once the items had been selected, if there was likely to be a long wait, some might still head back next door to the lunch club and wait for us to bring their goods and change through once things had died down. By 12.15pm the food co-op had usually started to quieten down, leaving more time for volunteers to catch up, have a cup of tea or do some chores as directed by Jenny, such as giving the fridge its monthly clean, bagging up nuts, grains and pulses or taking stock. Volunteers would also do their shopping, with some spending no more than the

£3.60 lunch allowance that most chose to spend on fruit and veg, while others would do more of a weekly shop. Once everyone had finished, these expenses were documented and each volunteer was reimbursed for £3.60 worth of their shopping. We would then finish packing up the tables, cash up the till, and volunteers would start to dissipate.

When the food co-op started to have a second opening from 5-8pm (later adjusted to 5-7pm), I chose to do a double shift as this enabled me to become more involved with the food co-op and the centre itself. Sometimes I spent my break exploring the area around St Hilda's further; at others, I stayed in the centre, reading, studying or sharing lunch with some of the staff. In the evening we then went through the same routine, setting up, serving customers, and packing down at the end of the evening, albeit which far fewer volunteers. Once we were done with this by about 8.30pm (or 7.30pm with the adjusted hours), I would often head south to Elephant and Castle to do the weekly Infinity order at Fareshares before taking the one-hour tube journey home to Walthamstow in northeast London, with rather tired feet.

Although I worked various different shifts at Fareshares during my PhD fieldwork, starting with a Thursday evening when the co-op was open to customers for my first four or five months, and one or two Saturdays a month for the last five months or so, the one I stayed with the longest was unpacking on a Wednesday afternoon, which needed additional help at that time. Work at Fareshares could be much more atomised than at St Hilda's as everyone worked on different shifts. Each person had responsibility for their shift, with one or two other people, and for specific jobs, at times individually and at times with a handful of others, such as the ordering and Facebook page curation which I helped out with. There were also times and places to come together though, such as the members' email list, which was often active with updates and questions about what was going on in the project, or the monthly meetings, occasional working groups on specific topics and cleaning days.

For much of the sixteen months I worked the Wednesday shift, it was often just Ed and me, although other volunteers would sometimes stop in to lend a hand, especially when I first started the shift. It had been short for a while, so people had started trying to come by when they could so that Ed did not have to do it on his own. When we arrived at 4pm, the various deliveries would already be there, and over the months, Ed and I got into a quiet routine, taking it in turns to check off the dried goods or fruit and vegetables before putting aside any

pre-orders, and then placing all of the goods on the co-op's shelves. While the shop did have its aesthetic values, ranging from walls and shelving painted orange, turquoise and green to dark brown wood and ply storage bunkers that had been hand built by Martin, one of the founder members, back in the food co-op's early years, there was less concern about making displays look 'pretty'. Reflecting Fareshares' non-consumerist values, the food co-op was not attempting to use visual marketing techniques to encourage shoppers to buy. Instead, the goods were placed simply into vegetable racks, shelves or jars. The 25 kilogram sacks of grains, seeds and pulses were housed in black, heavy duty plastic rubbish bins with scoops for customers to portion out as much or as little as they wanted. Once this was done, we priced up the fruit and veg, reported any issues with the orders and did any other admin jobs that were needed before brushing and mopping the floor. We could be finished anytime between 6 and 7.30pm depending on the size of the order. As there were no shoppers to interact with, the shift gave Ed and me plenty of time to chat about our lives, our values and the workings of Fareshares, developing our own ways of working with each other. Ed was a quiet and thoughtful person, who, having lived in a housing co-operative for over thirty years, was also great to talk to about the ideals and realities of co-operation. Sadly, he is no longer with us as he died less than four months after I completed my fieldwork. I still miss him and think of him often.

Organisation of the thesis

In the first chapter I tell the story of the foundation of Fareshares and St Hilda's East Food Co-ops. In doing so, I highlight how each is connected to specific political regimes and ideologies, arguing that these are fundamental to their structures and ethos. I then contextualise the political economic climate in Britain at the time of my fieldwork, again exploring how this interacts with the practices and experiences of each food co-op. In the final section I discuss how the food co-ops and their participants fit within the contemporary period, showing some of the tensions they feel in relation to issues such as funding and party-political community resilience strategies (at St Hilda's); and diverse values and desires for the food co-op amongst members (at Fareshares). In doing so, I show the increasing ephemerality (Vargas-Cetina 2005) of food co-ops in austerity Britain, as well as some of their countercultural (Bauman 1976) qualities in relation to normative food and economic practices or welfare reform.

Chapter two offers a contextual backdrop to the perceptions of poverty, welfare and aid in contemporary Britain, which inform the experiences of those involved with the food co-ops discussed in this thesis. Here, I take a closer look at what Hobsbawm (1999:204) describes as 'the rise, fall and revival of *laissez-faire*' in relation to government economic theory, as well as the forms of aid and moral economy that accompanied each phase. In relation to aid, we see a transition from dominant discourses of individualised self-help and charitable giving in the 19th century, to state welfare and perceptions of equal citizenship, then back to more punitive discourses and rationalities of deservingness in relation to state welfare. Through this exploration, I discuss perceptions of poverty in each era, how these are tied to political economic theory and the forms of citizens and subjectivity that this promotes. In the final sections I also highlight the impacts of the most recent changes to welfare on the lives and experiences of participants at St Hilda's and Fareshares food co-ops. All this offers significant context for the chapters that follow.

In chapter three, I continue to engage with issues of citizenship, deservingness and aid with a specific focus on food aid – the rise and roll out of food banks in the UK, and the impact this has had on food-access-based food co-ops. I also discuss the role volunteerism has come to play in the provision of food aid along with the forms of care that can be enacted through participation in food schemes. I then look more closely at practices of aid and exchange within Fareshares and St Hilda's East, the social and financial value of the goods they stock, the ideologies that food co-ops attempts to work by and the ways in which these ideologies interact and push back against forms of capitalist exchange and charity.

The final two chapters look at community, place and social organisation. In chapter five I look outwards from the food co-ops to contextualise them more thoroughly within two areas deeply impacted by housing reform and regeneration – Shoreditch and Elephant and Castle. I show the ways in which this has inspired both nostalgia for past communities, and heightened desires to create inclusive spaces in terms of class, race or ethnicity, however tension ridden this may be. I also explore the food co-ops' practices of community-building and boundary-making along with the forms of inclusion or exclusion that each of these can entail.

In the final chapter, I look inwards at the social organisation of each food co-op, their relationship to notions of hierarchy and horizontality as well as the tensions that attempts at the latter can cause in each co-op. I focus in on the practices and ideals around care and political action that these represent, the different ideologies that these are drawn from and the ways in which other value systems and experiences can conflict with ideal typical models of ownership and autonomy. This chapter also looks at the ways in which these food co-ops attempt to create models of work in opposition to more alienating or exploitative forms of wage labour and volunteerism which have arisen, in part, due to welfare reform and the flexibilisation of labour.

Part one – Experiences of change

Do They Owe Us A Living?

Fuck the politically minded, here's something I want to say,

About the state of nation, the way it treats us today.

At school they give you shit, drop you in the pit,

You try, you try, you try to get out, but you can't because they've fucked you about.

Then you're a prime example of how they must not be,

This is just a sample of what they've done to you and me.

Do they owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

Owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

Owe us a living?

Of course they fucking do.

Don't want me anymore, cos I threw it on the floor.

Used to call me sweet thing, I'm nobody's plaything,

And now that I am different, you'd love to bust my head,

You'd love to see me cop-out, love to see me dead.

Do they owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

Owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

Owe us a living?

Of course they fucking do.

The living that is owed to me I'm never going to get,

They've buggered this old world up, up to their necks in debt.

They'd give you a lobotomy for something you ain't done,

They'll make you an epitome of everything that's wrong.

Do they owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

Owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

Owe us a living?

Of course they fucking do.

Don't take any notice of what the public think,

They're so hyped up with T.V., they just don't want to think.

They'll use you as a target for demands and for advice,

When you don't want to hear it they'll say you're full of vice.

Do they owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

Owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

Owe us a living?

Of course they fucking do.

(Crass 1978)

Chapter one - Politics, change and shifting temporalities

Fareshares

As the police and bailiffs attempted to enter the Pullens Estate, a noxious slurry of rotten apples, vegetable peelings and manure from the local city farm rained down on them. The squatters inside had been filling buckets and tin baths for several weeks, all stored on the rooves of the housing estate, in preparation for the planned, mass eviction. From 6.30am onwards, the day pulsated with the rhythm of bailiffs' sledgehammers and New Orleans Jazz, which came from the crowd that had assembled on the street in solidarity with the squatters. As Adina, one of the founder members of Fareshares and a squatter on the estate at the time recounted to me, people inside and out also sang in peaceful protest.

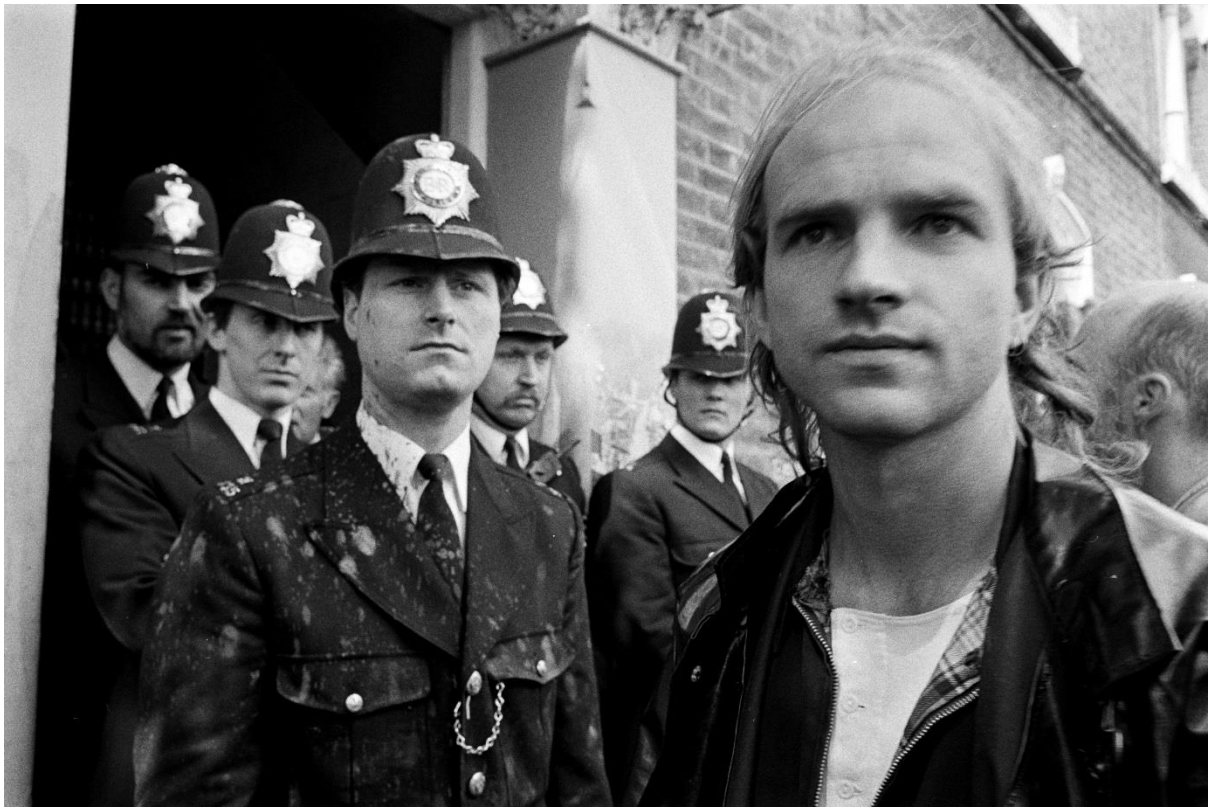


Figure 6 Pullens Eviction. Crispin Hughes, 1986.

Once the bailiffs had made it through the shower of rotten veg and shit, they started the arduous job of dismantling barricades. Both the stairwells and the doors to many flats had been blocked – nailed shut and stopped up with anything from boards to steel, barbed wire or concrete blocks (SNOW 1986). Door numbers were painted over too, making it all the more difficult for the bailiffs to work out which flats to evict (mudlark121 2018). All this made their

pace of progress through the estate slow. By noon, just sixteen of the thirty planned squat evictions had been completed (mudlark121 2018). The bailiffs, riot police and council representatives started to dissipate, and the squatters began to organise again. Within hours, many of them had returned to the Pullens Estate, moving furniture back in and fixing smashed-up doors.

Figure 7 'Welcome to Southwark a Homeless Zone'. Crispin Hughes, 1986.

The year was 1986, and as novelist Hanif Kureishi put it 'revolution had come at last: Margaret Thatcher was its figurehead' (2008:190). Others also characterise Thatcher in revolutionary terms as one of the key actors in the promotion of neoliberalism as the guiding principle of political-economic practices, along with President Ronald Reagan in the USA and the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping of the People's Republic of China (Harvey 2007:1–2). As Harvey (ibid.) defines it, neoliberalism is a doctrine that,

> proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

As for the state, its role is to 'create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices' (ibid). As well as creating changes in terms of economic policies and modes of governing, neoliberal processes have also had profound impacts on culture, citizenship, welfare and political action in the UK, some of which are apparent in the stories of Fareshares and St Hilda's East that I discuss here. Having described how each food co-op was founded, and the ways in which each reflects a specific era in the trajectory of neoliberalism in Britain, I move on in section two to discuss the contemporary context that Fareshares and St Hilda's are operating in today in relation to Brexit, austerity and more polarised forms of politics. In section three I look at the challenges and constraints they face in the current political economic climate and the ways in which they have to consider their aims, ethos and sustainability in such an environment – if and how to adjust and adapt and the tensions inherent in these choices.

Margaret Thatcher became the first female Prime Minister of the UK in 1979 as the leader of the Conservative Party, and by the time of the attempted eviction of the Pullens' Estate in the mid-1980s, the country had seen the deregulation of financial services (the 'Big Bang'), the privatisation of national institutions such as British Telecom, British Gas and British Airways and an accelerated programme to sell off council housing – 'Right to Buy' ibid. 2012:7). Union power and local government, both seen as bastions of the left, were also curbed through caps on local taxation, the abolition of the Greater London Authority, a ban on union membership at the government intelligence communication centre (GCHQ) and the 1984 Trade Unions Act which removed legal immunity for unions which held strikes without balloting their members first (Jackson and Saunders 2012:7–8). Thatcher described the unions as the 'enemy within', and 'dangerous to liberty' (Travis and editor 2013). One of the most famous symbols of her campaign to break their power was the lengthy Miners' Strike of 1984-5. Although the National Union of Mineworkers attempted to fight against pit closures through industrial action and a call for a new agreement on how to manage closures, by the 3rd of March 1985 they had agreed to return to work with no such agreement in place. This marked a significant moment in the decline of heavy industry in the UK, and from this point onwards, the programme of pit closures only accelerated. Despite the fact that the miners had agreed to return to work 'in order to … salvage the union' (Lyddon n.d.), many also saw this event as a nail in the coffin for trade unionism in Britain.

Thatcher and her party's policies were in stark contrast to those of the post-Second World War Labour Party, famous for implementing the welfare state, nationalising industries such as manufacturing and resources such as the Bank of England and the national rail system. In the name of socialist values, the post-war period had also seen the introduction of the National Health Service (NHS), social security provisions,[12] and the construction of hundreds of thousands of council houses, as I discuss further in chapter two. Thatcher characterised this welfare system as a 'nanny state', which had supressed ''indigenous' forms of self-help' (Hyatt 2012:164–5). In its place she promoted the idea of an 'enterprise culture' which put a greater emphasis on self-reliance and entrepreneurialism. These discourses and Thatcher's self-proclaimed interest in Victorian values (Evans 2004), invoked 'a fantasy of a return to a past state of spontaneous welfarism willed from "below" rather than pushed from "above"' (Muehlebach 2012:62). Through the withdrawal of public services, there was an expectation that, rather than relying on the state, poor communities would improve their own situations through a 'duty' as individuals to look after themselves, their families and their neighbours (Thatcher in Margaret Thatcher: A Life in Quotes 2013). This stance was immortalised in Thatcher's pronouncement that 'there's no such thing as society', which was made in an interview with *Woman's Own* magazine in the autumn of 1987. As public services became privatised, individuals were also expected to be discerning and rational about which of the new, non-state services they chose to consume (Hyatt 2012:164). The aspiration, therefore, was for a more consumer-focused, active, and 'responsibilized' citizen (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996:12).

Following on from an era in which the Labour Party had celebrated their 1975 election victory by singing the socialist anthem *The Red Flag* (Brown 2001), by the mid-1980s, the term 'socialism' had more or less dropped out of the vocabulary of mainstream party politics (Jackson and Saunders 2012:16). This was thanks to the Cold War between the communist East and capitalist West, and Thatcher's move towards a more neoliberal mode of governing. According to some young, left-wing activists, it felt like the country was 'close to a social breakdown… the Unions had been defeated, the Labour party had rolled over and died, and

[12] This included a family allowance of 5s a week for each child after the first, unemployment and sick pay, benefits for people injured at work, and 'national assistance' for anyone in severe need.

much of the revolutionary Left was an embarrassment' (Anon 2018).[13] Anarchism was an important part of the zeitgeist at that time, which was, in many ways, shaped and defined by Thatcherism (The Bash Street Kids 1998). The punk music of the late 1970s and '80s is said to have catalysed and disseminated 1980s anarchist ideology (Cross 2014:136; Anon 2018). In particular, British bands Crass and Poison Girls worked collaboratively to promote anarcho-punk through their lyrics, activist acts and pedagogical album notes. As well as taking an anti-war and anti-nuclear stance, anarcho-punk's interests extended to,

> militant vegetarianism and animal liberation; civil liberties and opposition to police powers; struggles against wage slavery; feminism and struggles over gender equality; opposition to organised religion; and opposition to cuts and the reductions in the wider 'social wage'. (Cross 2014:137)

Do-it-Yourself (DIY) principles were key to their identity, and these revolved around values of non-profit making, autonomy, anti-commercialism, collaboration and anti-hierarchical organising (ibid.). All this reflected a sense of disaffection with aspects of Thatcher's Britain in an era of rising unemployment, economic volatility, the Falklands War and perceived immanent nuclear war.

Squatting was also common at this time. The population of London had almost halved in the 40 year period from 1941-81. People moved out to new suburbs, leaving empty properties in, often, run down areas. Many of these filled up with activists and artists, as well as other people on low incomes (Elms 2011). By the 1980s, Southwark, where the Pullens Estate is located, had become the most squatted borough in London 'largely due to the poor quality of the housing stock and the incompetence of the council' (mudlark121 2018). More than 60% of the council's empty properties in its immediate area, Walworth, were squatted by the mid-1980s (ibid.). The area also had a squatters' network, SNOW (Squatters' Network of Walworth), which included one of Fareshares' founding members, Martin Oddsocks - or to give him his full name, Martin OddsocksMcWeirdoeltuttifruttiMrfartohellohippopotamus-bumIthinkwecanallliveincooperationasfreeindividualswithouthurtingourfellowsentientbeing

[13] Working with anarchist and squatter history I use a range of sources including some which would often be considered less 'authoritative' such as blogs, zines and activist materials in order to allow these movements to speak for themselves rather than simply refer to academic accounts about what they did and how that period felt for them.

sbutwewillhavetoworkonittheworldisforsharing (undercurrentspaulo, 2010). This is a name he registered by deed poll in order to 'confound the forces of law and order' (in Martin's words) when he was regularly in police stations and courts of law. As Martin described it to me, SNOW was 'a large, squatting self-help group, a mutual aid group' and it was very active. By 1986, however, the council was attempting a crackdown on unlawful occupation in the borough with plans to clear 800 squats (mudlark121 2018), including those on the Pullens Estate.

While the Pullens eviction was unsuccessful, others were. These included the 'half knocked down street off the Old Kent Road' where Martin was living, which was demolished on the 15th of January 1988 with just 16 hours' notice. Martin had been running a buying group called Rabbit Food Co-op out of his flat there for a while, and Adina, who was living on the Pullens Estate at the time, mentioned to him that the shop next to her flat on Crampton Street was empty. It had been for around a decade. They started to discuss the idea of setting up a storefront food co-op there. When Martin's housing was knocked down, he moved into the back of the corner shop at 56 Crampton Street, and work started to turn the front into a food co-op.

As Adina recalled,

> We knocked a hole through the back of our toilet [in the flat next door]… got through to the back of the workshop area and knocked a hole big enough to climb through. We went in and we started getting a bit of electricity in and we had a friend who was an electrician… Once we'd got water and electric in there, we un-boarded the front bit and there we were.

When they first got into the building it was filled with gravestones, old fireplaces and other bits of masonry, which the council were storing in the building. Reluctant to throw these out, they went to visit the council at their office on the nearby Walworth Road to ask if they wanted to pick everything up, or let the squatters get rid of it. A few days later, the council

came by with a van to move the items elsewhere.[14] In terms of electricity, there were many people on the Pullens who knew how to adjust the meters as Adina explained,

> What they did with the electricity meters is that they would just slow it down. So, it would go so slow that you were only paying like a penny a week for the electricity or something. So it wasn't like you weren't paying anything at all. You were paying something, but it was much, much less.

Figure 8 56 Crampton Street in 1978. Source: 56a Archive.

It took around three months to get the old corner shop ready, but on Sunday 13th March 1988, Fareshares opened for 'non-business' as a vegan, wholefood co-op. Along the walls in the early days there were hand-written posters highlighting different aspects of the project's principles – fair conditions for food producers; welfare for animals; Fareshares 'not cheating anyone' as it was a non-profit project. Others dealt with practicalities – requesting users to

[14] An act that seems remarkably tolerant and facilitative when compared with the current situation for squatters in the UK, which generally sees them moved on very swiftly, and since 2012 has included the criminalisation of squatting in residential properties.

donate when they could and to tidy up after themselves, and reminding them that all of the workers were volunteers. There was also a slogan that read – 'nobody's business, everybody's business' presenting discourses of social anarchism, collective ownership, reconfigured economic relationships, and non-hierarchical organising.

Figure 9 Fareshares early 1990s. Source: 56a archive.

Resembling the countercultural wholefood co-ops of the 1960s and '70s, it was a place to buy wholegrains, soya milk, organic vegetables and other vegan goods, while also practicing alternative politics. In the early days, there was very little shelving, so many of the goods were placed in crates and boxes on the floor. 'Kind of perversely, we didn't have too many things in sacks at the beginning because we couldn't afford it.' Martin told me. 'It was a question of gradually, gradually building up the value of the stock. Particularly in the first few years, it was essentially built up with my dole money.' He laughed. 'So, apart from a few porridge oats… everything would have been in five kilogram bags, which would have been bagged down.' To build the stock further, Martin used to borrow four or five hundred pounds from his parents each November so Fareshares could buy extra goods. By buying in greater quantities, the food co-op was able to get a bigger discount on the stock, and the savings made could be invested into further items. Martin would then pay his parents back by Christmas.

There were many wholefoods workers co-ops around in those days, and Fareshares got the bulk of its goods from one in a nearby area called Loughborough Junction. To begin with, Martin would pick the goods up on his bike, but as the project grew, different delivery arrangements were made. Bread also came from a south London workers' co-op, while vegetables were initially bought from a woman called Oriel, who sourced them from a farm in Kent and sold them as part of a box scheme in Denmark Hill. From the beginning, there was always a desire to work with other co-operatives. 'They were there, so it was possible.' Martin explained. There were also various 'idiosyncratic one or two person businesses' that they bought from, which included vegan, sugar-free 'community cookies' made by a former 'hash cake maker by appointment to Jimmy Hendrix.'[15]

When I asked Martin if there was anything else around like Fareshares at the time, his response was along the lines of 'not quite'. The other food co-ops he was aware of worked on a more 'conventional' consumer co-op model with membership policies and, potentially, profits. Fareshares was always more loose with no official membership structure. Anyone could shop and socialise there or get more involved by helping out with a shift. 'You became a member by using it' Martin told me. It also worked on a strictly non-profit-making basis. He felt that this less rigid or conventional structure was one of the elements that made the space 'some sort of education tool' in relation to food. Following Martin's own food politics, key components of Fareshares' ethos were veganism, local goods and the avoidance of so-called cash-crops such as tea, coffee and sugar. As Martin explained,

> I'd read a bunch of stuff in my late teens. Stuff about food politics and development and the ever-worsening terms of trade and the basic raw materials and the foodstuffs being continually drained away from places where most people were quite poor and having all the value added elsewhere. I was involved with a few people thinking how can you try to disengage with all that? Eschewing things like tea and coffee and sugar for political reasons and the whole vegan slant was always about fairness for human-animals as much as any other animals.

Martin admitted that from the time of Rabbit Food Co-op onwards, the stock was an eclectic mix of what he could afford, what people wanted to buy and what he wanted people to buy.

[15] A very famous American rock guitarist and singer songwriter who died in 1970.

Others within the collective also saw the value of this kind of food politics though. 'Being a vegan was a very political statement' Adina explained, and there were not many of them around. She also identified the avoidance of 'third world cash crops' as a key political factor along with the co-op's choice to operate on a non-profit basis. The founder members attempted to keep the food co-op's range deliberately spartan – pulses and grains, dried fruits, sugar-free jams, nut and seed butters, soya-milk, vinegars, oils and condiments, seaweeds, breads, organic fruit and veg, ecological cleaning products, toilet paper and the odd vegan treat like the 'community cookies'.

As more people started to use the project, making it less reliant on Martin's dole money,[16] many goods were bought in bulk. As Adina recalled,

> Martin is a really dedicated nutter. He didn't want to create any waste, so they bought everything in massive containers and decanted it. There wasn't recycling like there is now with bins on the end of the street. They hadn't started any of that. Maybe there were bottle banks, sometimes near the supermarket. So, it was a recycling project as well. There were two massive sinks at the back where the Infoshop is now… somebody's awful job was cleaning all these jars in cold water and then filling them up with oil or washing up liquid or whatever we were doing in bulk.

For a time, paper and cardboard were also collected for recycling as there were no facilities for this in the area.

In the first few years, the project consistently made losses, which, according to a newsletter of theirs from 1989, was down to:

> * An overgenerously slapdash approach to weighing out dry goods, veg etc.
> * Failure to keep the shop prices in line with wholesale price rises.
> * Periods of time when donations have not been remotely sufficient to meet running costs (heating, lighting, replacement of equipment, etc.).

[16] Paid to the unemployed by the state.

* Occasional instances of suspected petty theft, and one of un-petty theft.
* Users' debts have not always been settled with the desired promptness (!)

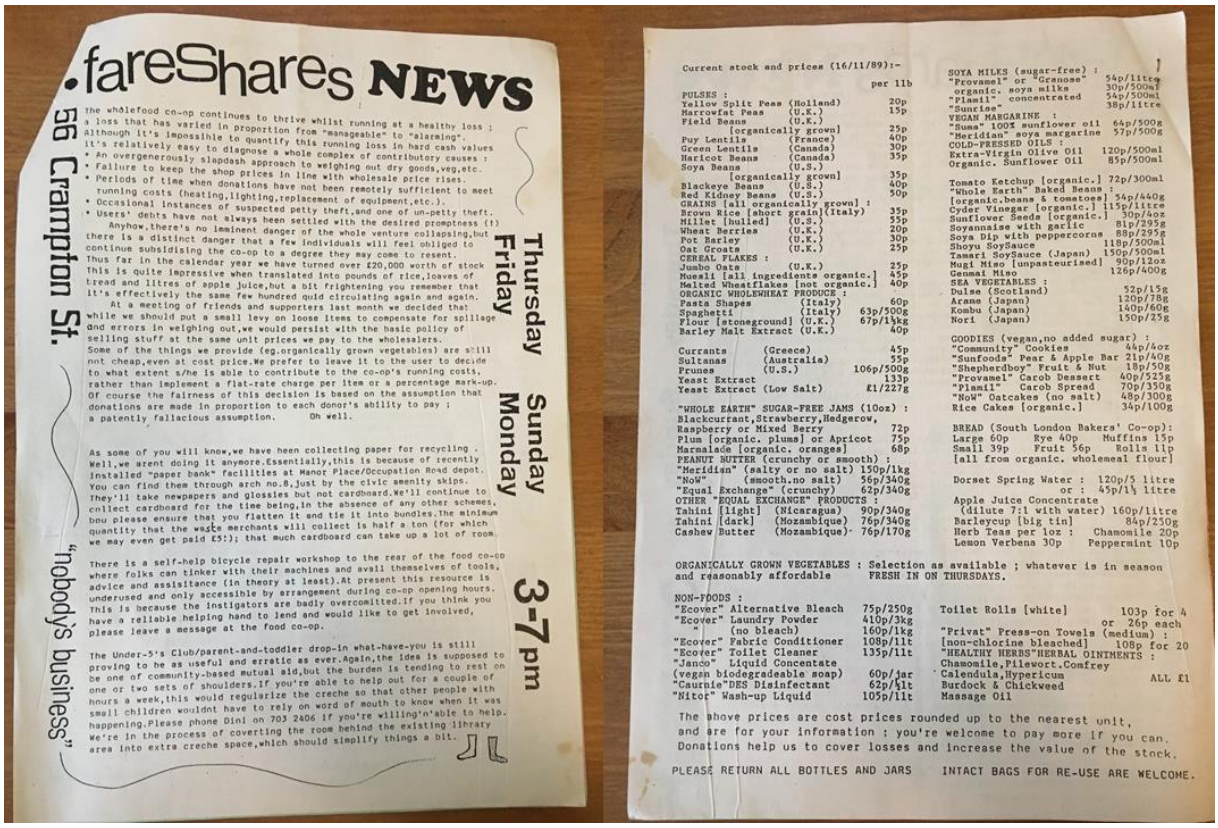
To compensate for this, Martin regularly subsidised the project with his own money to begin with.

Following a meeting of 'friends and supporters' the co-op decided to add a small mark-up to the dried foods to account for this discrepancy. But everything else was to remain at cost price. As they acknowledged in the newsletter, though, even at cost price 'some of the things we provide (e.g. organically grown vegetables) are still not cheap'. Instead, they agreed to 'leave it to the user to decide to what extend s/he is able to contribute to the co-op's running costs' (i.e. how much of an additional donation to make on top of the cost price of goods in the food co-op). The newsletter added that, 'the fairness of this decision is based on the assumption that donations are made in proportion to each donor's ability to pay; a patently fallacious assumption. Oh well.' Despite all this, in the 11 months to November 1989 Fareshares 'managed to turn over £20,000 worth of stock' (fareShares 1989).

As well as selling foods, the co-op soon had a library area for swapping books, a crèche and self-help bike repair space. A couple of years after Fareshares opened, Martin moved into the flat next door, and by 1991, the space that he had been living in became the 56a Infoshop – an anarchist social centre.

In terms of regulation, the council took little interest in the early days. The crèche was visited once and deemed to fall between the cracks as it was neither a proper crèche nor a baby and toddlers drop-in service. As such, the council representative told them no action was required. No one came to inspect how the food was being kept or handled as far as Martin could remember. 'There never was anything about licencing or food hygiene I don't think… That's a card they could have played,' Martin acknowledged, 'but they never chose to. It puzzled me slightly.' Not long after the food co-op was in full operation though, someone did visit them to discuss the payment of commercial rent. 'We couldn't do it', Martin explained, so legal action commenced. Luckily for them, the first set of court proceedings did not come to anything as the person dealing with their case left. 'We weren't causing too much of a

problem and we didn't kick up a fuss, so it just got forgotten about.' The council made two further attempts at eviction, but eventually conceded, instead, moving the project onto a 'peppercorn' (nominal) rent. As far as Adina remembers, this was around one pound a year. 'It was nothing' she recalls. 'But it was to make it official.' Over time, the rent started to increase slowly, but even today, it is reasonably low and the building is entitled to business rate relief as all of its projects are non-profit making.



.fareShares NEWS

56 Crampton St.

"nobody's business"

Thursday Friday Sunday Monday 3-7 pm

Current stock and prices (16/11/89):-

Figure 10 Fareshares Newsletter, 1989.

While Adina left the area in 1991, Martin stayed for seven years in total. There were various reasons for him deciding to leave at that point. As well as wanting to move on to other things, he and others in the project felt that him stepping down would be the only way for Fareshares to become truly sustainable. At that point, he was still seen as the lynchpin of the project in many ways. People regularly deferred to him as they knew that it had been his baby to begin with. He still lived in the flat next door, so it also fell to him to cover shifts when others did not show up. Having invested so much money in Fareshares over the years, before Martin left, they held a fundraiser so that they could try to pay him back, asking people who used Fareshares to buy 'shares' in the project in order to keep it running, but with a clear

understanding that they would never get the money back. In the end, they were able to give Martin about half of what he had put in and he seemed happy enough with that.

Just as the mid-1990s marked a period of change at Fareshares, in the country more broadly, the political mood was also changing. When Margaret Thatcher reluctantly resigned from her position as the UK's longest serving Prime Minister of the 20th century in 1990, politics was dogged by civil unrest in response to the newly implemented community charge known as the poll tax and party infighting about the European Economic Community (which was later incorporated into the newly formed European Union in 1993). Thatcher was succeeded by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer John Major, who had been a strong ally of hers.

St Hilda's East

Having turned 18 just two days before the 1st May 1997 general election, like many other young adults, I received a video cassette of a Labour party-political broadcast in the post. The video depicted a smartly dressed man in his early 40s walking down a high street on the way to cast his vote – polling card tucked into his front pocket. His face was yet to be seen. On his way, a band of multicultural citizens engaging in a range of daily activities – having haircuts, selling flowers, and handing out balloons on roller skates – enthusiastically greeted this mysterious figure as he passed. They then followed him down the street in a Pied Piper-esque procession. After he had cast his vote, the man was finally revealed to be Tony Blair, the soon to be Prime Minister (1997-2007). All this was accompanied by the pop song *Things Can Only Get Better* by D:Ream (Labour Party 1997).

By the mid-1990s, the Conservative Party was going through a rough patch. Reflecting his caricature in the puppet satire show *Spitting Image*, John Major was seen as a grey (dull) man who had struggled to move out of Margaret Thatcher's shadow. His cabinet was also mired in sexual scandals, infighting and alleged corruption. Many saw Blair as a refreshing alternative – young,[17] charismatic, and filled with new ideas for the Labour Party, and the country. He and his party promised a 'new', clean politics, which promoted the idea of free trade, wealth creation and a healthy economy, as well as welfare provision that ensured a

[17] At 43, Blair was the youngest leader to be elected since 1812 when he became Prime Minister in 1997. As a consequence the press nicknamed him 'Bambi' after the main character of the animated Disney film of the same name, who was a deer fawn (From Bambi to Blair 2007).

prospering NHS and education system (From Bambi to Blair 2007). On the 1st of May 1997, Labour won a landslide victory.

In Tony Blair's words, the mission for 'New' Labour, as they came to be known, was,

> …to promote and reconcile the four values which are essential to a just society which maximizes the freedom and potential of all our people – equal worth, opportunity for all, responsibility and community.' (Blair 1998 in Rose 2000:1397)

This period came to be known for increased spending on services such as health and education; attempts at creating a more inclusive Britain, where more women were present in the cabinet, and where communities were more multicultural. In terms of this multiculturalism and the potential for civil unrest, New Labour's approach centred on the idea of community cohesion, in which relationships were fostered between people from different backgrounds, and where everyone should have similar life opportunities (Shukra et al. 2004:188).

Tony Blair believed that the world was changing fast in relation to interconnection and globalisation, both of which could be a good thing for his brand of politics. As a consequence, his party implemented a programme of managed migration, which saw the expansion of low and high skilled worker schemes in the UK, the relaxation of work permit criteria, and the doubling of international students. Through this expansion, New Labour hoped to reap the positive economic benefits of global labour migration. In 2004, citizens of eight countries which were about to join the EU were also granted the immediate right to work in the EU (Consterdine 2017) including the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In 2004 and 2005 alone, 129,000 migrants from these countries entered the UK as part of what became 'one of the largest migration flows in Britain's peacetime history' (Consterdine 2016).

The means by which New Labour structured welfare and fostered community were clearly very different to those of Thatcher or Major, but, with the adoption of market models for some public services and increased citizen responsibilisation, they still had a distinctly neoliberal flavour. As Stuart Hall (2005:319) highlights, 'eighteen years of Thatcherite rule had radically altered the social, economic, and political terrain in British society'. In the run up to

the 1997 election, the Labour Party had a decision to make about whether to stick with old left politics or adapt to the climate and rationalities that Thatcherism had created by subscribing to centrist politics and more neoliberal policy positions. They opted for the latter.

New Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw (1997-2001) described the 'Third Way' stance they adopted as 'a clear coherent route between the Right… and the old, neo-Marxist Left' (Straw, 1998 in Rose 2000:1396). Like Margaret Thatcher, Straw, announced that 'there is no such "thing" as society' at a conference devoted to the Third Way (ibid.:1395). While Thatcher's famous assertion suggested that it is neither the government, nor society's job to solve people's problems as this led to a cycle of dependency that stopped them from taking responsibility for themselves, Straw packaged citizen responsibility in softer terms. As he put it, 'society in not a "thing" external to our experiences and responsibilities. It is us, *all of us*' (ibid., emphasis added), thus emphasising collaboration, collectivity and citizen participation, as well as individual responsibility. The role of Parliament, he suggested, was not only to share this belief, but also to mark it out (ibid.:1396). In other words, while the state had to 'provide the conditions for a good life', which should be available to all in principle, its subjects 'must deserve to inhabit it by building strong communities and exercising active responsible citizenship' (ibid.:1398).

New Labour's Third Way also had a decidedly moral tone, emphasising a 'framework of belief', or subjectivity, that both citizens and Parliament must conform to (ibid.: 1396). In line with this push towards greater citizen participation, the 'third sector', which comprises of non-governmental and non-profit-making organisations such as community and voluntary groups, charities and co-operatives, expanded rapidly. This project of 'welfare diversification' created a more professionalised and competitive third sector, which was expected to carry more of the weight of welfare provision (Lambie-Mumford 2017:107). This agenda has since been carried forward by the Conservative Party's 'Big Society' most prominent in David Cameron's early years as Prime Minister of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government, which was in power from 2010-15.

As Hyatt (2012:160) notes, during the Thatcherite Conservative years (1979-97), high levels of community activism emerged in the UK, which attempted to defend the communities that its welfare reforms were perceived to be failing. She argues that with the arrival of New

Labour, however, the 'oppositional energy' of these activities 'was increasingly domesticated and harnessed'. Instead, activists 'were enmeshed into participating in a range of bureaucratic projects of self-governing', which were fundamental to the logics of the Third Way. Local communities were expected to help with the regeneration of local areas while participating in mutual contracts with local authority figures.

The interest in volunteerism from the Thatcher years onwards is not exclusive to the UK. Just as the British state has taken much interest in the role of the volunteer since the 1980s, so too have international organisations such as the United Nations (UN). In fact, since 1985, the UN has also marked the 5th of December as International Volunteer Day, in recognition of the 'important contribution to socio-economic development activities' that volunteers make (United Nations General Assembly 1985). This is a means for third sector organisations to promote volunteerism and for the UN to encourage governments to support volunteer activities in their countries.

The EU has also taken much interest in volunteers in recent years, as part of efforts to expand and cohere the union. This has included the implementation of the European Commission initiative the 'European Voluntary Service' in 1998, which promotes the mobility of 18-30 year old volunteers between EU member states; and the designation of 2011 as the 'European year of voluntary activities promoting active citizenship'. As Rosakou (2016:85–86) notes, on 'the EU level, volunteering is discursively produced as an essential element that fosters "social solidarity" and "democracy," embodying EU and state citizenship'. She goes on to quote the Official Journal of the European Union to highlight that 'it is "an active expression of civic participation which strengthens common European values such as solidarity and social cohesion" because "[v]oluntary activities increase civic participation and can help foster a sense of belonging and commitment of citizens to their society at all levels – local, regional, national and European"'.

The systematisation and regulation of the voluntary sector has included a mixture of state and EU policies, leading to a complex network of different agents along with highly developed guidelines and training systems for charitable organisations, volunteer coordinators and volunteers themselves (ibid.:85).

In relation to food, many of these third sector schemes in the UK took the form of local food projects, which were funded by statutory services, such as local Primary Care Trusts (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014:83). This was a time of growing concern about food issues ranging from food safety (thanks to food scares such as BSE and foot-and-mouth disease)[18] to anorexia, obesity, and children's eating habits (Dowler and Caraher 2003:57). This interest in food was reflected in the number of food-schemes founded in this era. The early 2000s also saw the launch of the government's 5-a-Day programme, which encouraged people to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day in order to improve nutritional health, while reducing the risk of cardiac diseases, cancer and diabetes (Policy Navigator 2003). Local food projects were well placed to promote this message. Many local and health authorities also seized on the idea of community-based food initiatives when 'charged with reducing inequalities, exclusion and poverty' seeing them 'as a means of solving what are perceived to be the particular food problems of those who are poor and lack skills and decent affordable shops nearby' (Dowler and Caraher 2003:57).

These projects were certainly empowering for those participants who previously felt excluded or disenfranchised, and may have helped with food-based behaviour change in others. Nonetheless, food policy scholars Caraher and Dowler (ibid.) look at them with some negativity as these initiatives did not necessarily address wider structural issues. Neither did they build on the energy they created in order to develop wider strategies for a community, or fully engage local people in that process. For many of those involved in community food projects in this period, though, the early 2000s still felt more positive than life under Thatcherism, or, indeed, the current era of Conservative government. There was funding available, local authorities were receptive to the needs and concerns of activist and community groups, and they were able to get more done.

If Fareshares was formed at the height of Thatcherism, in a model of activism that befitted that era, then arguably St Hilda's East Food Co-op's form and structures are also reflective of

[18] Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, or 'mad cow disease', is a fatal, neurodegenerative disease in cattle, which is also transmissible to humans as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. There was a serious BSE crisis in the UK in the late 1980s and 1990s which led to the mass culling of contaminated cattle as well as the death of numerous people. Foot-and-mouth disease is a highly infectious virus affecting cloven-hooved animals. There was an outbreak in the UK in 2001. This led to a crisis in British agriculture and tourism, due to the risks that visiting rural areas could cause in terms of spreading the disease further.

New Labour, and some of the logics around community building and nutritional health apparent in local food projects at that time. Since around 1995, Tower Hamlets Co-operative Development Agency (CDA) had been particularly active in relation to community food co-ops, setting up more than 26 of them in the east London borough in a range of community centres, housing estates, religious buildings and schools. In line with the CDA's aim of enhancing health, wellbeing and economic conditions for the local community, they targeted areas 'where the population was at risk of poor-diet-related ill health such as Type 2 Diabetes, Cardio Vascular problems and Obesity' (Cohn 2015), issues which are all prevalent within Tower Hamlets and, in particular, within the Bengali community[19] that has been in the area in significant numbers since at least the 1960s (Tower Hamlets JSNA Reference Group 2016). Like many of the food co-ops set up in this period, Tower Hamlets CDA's schemes generally operated as market stalls selling fresh fruit and vegetables for a two to three hour shift, once a week or so. These were typically in areas of deprivation. There was often a paid coordinator from the host institution as well as volunteer labour from the local community.

The foundation of St Hilda's Food Co-op in 2005 very much built on the momentum within the borough. In 2005 the Bengali elders' day centre, which had been hosted in the sports hall at St Hilda's from Monday to Friday each week moved, out to a bespoke site further east in Shadwell, on the request of the local authority. Although it was not something that they would have chosen to do because, the day centre 'was really good in terms of multicultural contact between different groups', as Rupert, the community centre director told me, this loss did leave the hall free for other projects to move in.

A couple of other factors also helped to bring St Hilda's Food Co-op into being. Around that time, the community centre had received a report about local food co-ops from Tower Hamlets CDA who were looking for more sites for food co-ops. A local resident had also

[19] 'Bengali' is the term that people with Bangladeshi heritage most commonly used to describe themselves and their community in the area during my fieldwork. Many of the white, British people in the area referred to them as 'Bangladeshi'. I never heard anyone refer to people with Bangladeshi heritage with terms such as 'British Asian'. Discussing the distinction between 'Bengali' and 'Bangladeshi' with different people with Bangladeshi heritage, I got different answers ranging from one being a nationality and the other a language, to the two being interchangeable. None referred to the difference between ethnicity and nationality, and they were all too young to have been born before the division of India, which led to Bangladesh's formation. I, therefore, use the term 'Bengali', following the convention of anthropologists such as Claire Alexander who work extensively with this diaspora community in the UK (see for example Alexander 2000; Alexander 2011). I use the term 'community' with an understanding that this is not a homogenous group.

approached Lourdes, the volunteer coordinator at St Hilda's at the time, about setting one up at the centre as she had previously been involved with some in the USA and was keen to continue with them in London. By 2005, Lourdes had been working in community development for several years, having started at a community centre in Bow, another area in east London, in the late 1990s when she was 20. Lourdes could see the potential in the idea, so she made a proposal to the centre's managerial board. 'Obviously we had to have some conversations about what it would involve and finances' Rupert told me. But, as the centre was in a better financial position compared to the challenges that many community projects face today, it was able to take the financial risk of starting the project. With the board's approval, Lourdes began to set things in motion for a stall every Thursday morning in the sports hall. This was to be open to everyone within the neighbourhood.

The hall itself had the classic blond wooden floors marked out with coloured tape for various sporting activities, high ceilings and no external windows. Along the walls were stacked chairs and folding tables. On food co-op days, the tables were set up in a long line in the middle of the room, covered with patterned tablecloths and piled high with fruit and vegetables in the packing crates and boxes they arrived in. This configuration left enough space for a flow of people with shopping baskets, wheelchairs and helpers to move around easily. While the Bengali Elders' Project may have moved out, the room next door to the hall still housed the Older People's Project – a lunch club and weekday service for people aged 60 upwards which received some funding from the local council. Here too, the folding tables are covered with wipeable cloths, but the chairs are rather more comfy. The Older People's Project has been a significant customer base for the food co-op since the beginning, enabling people with potentially limited mobility to do their own shopping with the support of food co-op volunteers, to be a little more active and to benefit from interacting with the project and its participants.

When I asked Rupert what the main aim of the stall was at that time, he answered honestly that when it started, it did not have one 'clear mission statement'. Like many of the centre's projects, it worked more organically, responding to emerging needs and opportunities.

> So, there wasn't a decision at the management board, or by us, that we want to do this because it's an anti-food-poverty initiative… But I think the reason… that was

> certainly in Lourdes' mind and my mind and other people's minds, was that (not necessarily in this order) it was a really good initiative for making people more aware of healthy food and particularly in an area where people have bad nutrition, low incomes etc. that was really important… It's affordable fresh food … It provided a lifeline (which is always the word we use) to people coming into the community centre who are housebound in the Older People's Project… And, it also fitted in with the volunteering ethos of the community centre, sort of encouraging people from the local community to get involved, but also providing informal experience, on-the-job experience, to people who can then use that when applying (especially younger people), when applying for jobs.

In the early days, Tower Hamlets CDA, provided the fruit and vegetables, which they sourced from New Spitalfields Market in Leyton. The stall tried to take into consideration the diverse tastes of the community it was serving, providing a range of South Asian, Afro-Caribbean and seasonal British produce. To begin with, there was a lot of trial and error with some items, such as bulk bags of onions, selling very quickly while other produce went more slowly. Then there was the issue of pricing, '…although it's very trendy now, Shoreditch, when we set it [the food co-op] up, it wasn't.' Lourdes told me.

> It was really deprived. It still is really deprived, it's just hidden. But it wasn't a food desert and it isn't now, so people had a choice, they could go down the market and get a bowl of fruit for a pound or come and get some really nice fruit and veggies from us.

As savvy shoppers, many of the Bengali women in the area were well aware of produce prices in different shops and how much they were prepared to pay for each item; and while some things worked out cheaper at the food co-op, others did not. Instead, it focused on providing the freshest produce the wholesale market had to offer, that lasted a lot longer than the kind of pound-a-bowl produce you might find at some of the local street markets. It then sold these as cheaply as it could. Prices could also vary considerably from week to week depending on availability, harvests and markets, which customers did not always understand. 'I think they sometimes thought we made it up as we went along.' Lourdes commented wryly.

The weekly takings for the scheme could also vary wildly. 'We never ever made any money on it,' Lourdes explained 'but that wasn't the point... It was like, if we made five pounds, we were really happy because usually we lost a little bit.' Rupert, the director of the centre since 2001, was always very supportive of the scheme, and as he told me, 'once it was started, we could see the social value.' Between the two of them they were able to explain the value of the project to others in the centre, ensuring that it continued to 'carry' the project financially for some time without the trustees objecting.

Lourdes also had to ensure that there were enough people to run the stall,

> There was one time we would have people queuing up to get in. That was when I think a lot of the Bengali women had sussed that there were certain things that were really cheap with us. Then of course, it was really difficult to get volunteers, that sustainable flow of volunteers. So, we'd get a load of customers and then they'd be waiting ages at the tills, so it was really difficult to get it right. So, we'd get some of those, you know, more white, middle-class volunteers who'd come in for a bit and then they'd be off doing something else, and it was really hard to get that sustainable volunteer group in there. It was trial and error and working hard to get different volunteers in every week.

Lourdes acknowledged that the job was challenging in many ways. As volunteer coordinator for all of the projects in the community centre, it was a substantial amount of work to balance the food co-op's books, attempt to predict the weekly needs of the stall's customers, reiterate to the finance team that this was not intended as a profit-making project,[20] promote the food co-op and support its volunteers, all on top of her other work responsibilities as volunteer coordinator within the centre. Lourdes had no background in food, and she joked that her mum had said to her (mimicking her mum's Indian accent) 'Oh my God, did you get your degree to work at a market?' She persevered though, working things out through trial and error, or picking up the phone to the people she thought might be able to help – asking questions and setting up connections. It was still hard to juggle everything necessary to keep the project going, though, and she admitted that at one point she had needed to take a bit of

[20] They only added enough of a mark-up to cover the delivery costs of the produce.

time off from the food co-op as she was feeling worn out by the physical work involved as well as the challenges of keeping the project going.

In relation to funding she told me,

> it is hard when there's not a lot of funding around. It's really tough for these sorts of organisations [such as the community centre], you know, sort of middle sized… you're squabbling around for that same sort of funding, and it's tough.

Although these challenges continued for several years, in 2011, the food co-op started to become 'a vehicle for funding for St Hilda's' as Lourdes put it. This meant that Rupert and Lourdes were able to secure a Big Lottery grant as part of Local Food – a £59.8 million programme which attempted to make locally grown food more accessible and affordable to people. This distributed money to more than 500 projects across the UK (National Lottery Good Causes 2011). The funding, which lasted from August 2011 to March 2014, enabled the food co-op to provide accredited Social Enterprise Skills training to volunteers in order to 'increase their employability and entrepreneurial skills' (St Hilda's East Community Centre 2012). Rupert and Lourdes both saw this as a turning point for the food co-op. Through the funding, Lourdes was able to put more time into the food co-op and expand its activities further to include healthy living workshops, produce tastings, smoothie making and more networking with other organisations, such as the community centre's neighbour Women's Environmental Network, who take an interest in food growing and environmental sustainability.

Not long before the funding commenced, the food co-op started supplementing the produce on the stall with organics from a farm just to the east of London in Essex called Sarah Green's Organics. By getting it straight from the farm, they were able to offer organic produce for much less than any of the well-to-do, local shops which stocked it. Some of the people involved with these shops were surprised to see the prices at St Hilda's. 'We're just getting it straight from the farm' Lourdes explained, 'straight to the market for those low-income families to encourage them to really think about what they're eating where it's from, tasting it. It would taste a bit fresher, look a bit different… encouraging children as well.' Over the years the main supplier of (non-organic) fruit and vegetables also changed to Community Food Enterprise, a social enterprise based in Newington, east London, which provides good

quality fruit and vegetables from Spitalfields Market at more affordable prices to community food projects for a small delivery fee. The stall also started to sell pulses, rice and other dried products from a local cash and carry. These proved popular as the discounted, bulk prices meant the goods could be sold very cheaply at the food co-op.

In many ways, both St Hilda's and Fareshares food co-ops are responses to specific political-economic moments in time, adopting rationalities, modes of activism and community building that are reflective of each era. Since Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, the country's welfare and economic policies have been on a distinctly neoliberal trajectory. This has undoubtedly impacted the lives of everyday citizens. In terms of St Hilda's East and Fareshares' practices, this has, no doubt, informed their means and modes of activism, and community building, as well as the power of each. Since the late 1970s, neoliberal governmentality has been through many different phases in this country, corresponding to the ideologies of the parties and people in power as well as broader global political and economic events. Each new regime may have reframed or attempted to erase aspects of the one that went before, but the marks of each are still visible in mainstream politics and the lives of everyday citizens. Within this climate, both Fareshares and St Hilda's East have had to adapt to changing times and political moods as I will discuss in the following sections by looking at more recent political economic changes and their consequences.

Ruptures

'Are you IN or OUT?' Roger, an elderly, white English man, asked me as I sat down at a table in the Older People's Project at St Hilda's to talk to him and Elisabeth about placing an order with the newly formed food buying group. 'IN' I told him. 'Well everyone's entitled to their opinion' he said, making it clear that his was different to mine. He went on to explain that he was concerned about immigration, and that there were too many of 'them' using services in the UK and taking jobs. He acknowledged that the campaign was confusing though, especially as people in the same (Conservative) party, such as David Cameron and Boris Johnson were divided over the issue. He also suggested that the National Health Service would not function without people from other countries as everyone in it was 'coloured'. Nonetheless, he still felt that immigration was out of control. Pointing to the Suma catalogue I had in my hand, Doris (also white and English), who was sitting across the table, replied that if we did leave the EU, we probably wouldn't be able to get many of the products in it soon as a lot of them

were imported. After a few moments of silence, we went back to looking at the catalogue. Roger ordered a few boxes of English breakfast tea, as did Elisabeth, along with some dried beans and lentils. It was the 23rd of June 2016, the day of the 'Brexit' vote – a national referendum to decide whether the UK would leave the EU, and debates on either side had become heated in recent weeks.

The following day I woke up to the news that the Leave campaign had been successful, gaining a 51.9% share of the vote. Right-wing tabloid newspapers such as *The Daily Mail* featured jubilant front-page headlines including 'UK freed from the shackles of the EU', while broadsheets on both left and right seemed shocked by the decision. Within hours, word was spreading that racial abuse and hate crimes were already rising. Different forms of whiteness were also being more overtly 'marked out for distinction and differentiation' (Back, Sinha, and Bryan 2012:141) – 'indigenous' white British was at the top, and Eastern European at the bottom. Political commentators analysed the referendum results in terms of class, race and generational divisions. The UK public was presented in binaries – working class against middle class; old against young; liberal cosmopolitans against traditionalists and nationalists; and white English against just about everybody else. It was a protest vote by people who had been 'left behind' in a post-industrial era where working conditions and access to welfare had changed (Evans 2017). It was a 'culture war' between 'internationalist liberals and defenders of the more socially conservative values' (Stewart 2016; see also Bush 2016; Dunt 2016); or, a class war between the middle-class, liberal elites who had voted 'in' (remainers) and the less-educated (typically white) working classes who had voted 'out' (leavers).

While I did not get the chance to talk to Roger about the results of the referendum,[21] many of the conversations I did have with 'remainer' food co-op participants from both co-ops in the days that followed had a tone of fear, anger and anguish, which also reflected my own. In some ways there was also excitement though. It felt as if we were watching the political-economic system in the UK unravel; it was a moment of creative destruction and no one knew

[21] Outside of interview situations, I generally had a policy of allowing political conversations to come up naturally in my day-to-day work at each food co-op, rather than pressing people to talk about such contentious issues. This gave me a sense of what people felt compelled to talk about at different times, while also avoiding situations in which I might disrupt the activities of the food co-op or cause discomfort to anyone who did not wish to discuss such things. At St Hilda's, in particular, there were only a handful of participants who regularly brought up political issues, while most stuck to more neutral day-to-day topics such as food, family and details of their daily lives.

in quite what form the threads would come back together – what innovations it could lead to; which social bonds it would reconfigure; and what else it might annihilate or create along the way (Berman 2010:103).

Figure 13 'Make Britain Hate Again', Hackney, East London. Celia Plender, 2017.

Within hours of the results, the pound had plunged in value by nine percent to its lowest level for more than 30 years. David Cameron had also announced that he would be stepping down as Prime Minister as he believed that the British people had a different desire for the UK's relationship with the EU to his own (Stewart, Mason, and Syal 2016). Meanwhile, George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer's, pre-referendum warning of an emergency 'Brexit budget' featuring even deeper austerity cuts appeared to be looming on the horizon. Following Cameron's announcement a heated leadership race ensued culminating in the appointment of former Home Secretary to the Conservative Party, Theresa May, on the 13th of July 2016. In her inaugural speech, she attempted to address the economically 'left behind' who were often seen as the 'prime movers' in the Brexit vote (Stewart 2016), due to the anger and disenfranchisement that austerity had caused. She did this by directly addressing 'those families' that are 'just managing' with the following words,

> I know you're working around the clock, I know you're doing your best, and I know that sometimes life can be a struggle. The government I lead will be driven not by the interests of the privileged few, but by yours.
>
> We will do everything we can to give you more control over your lives. When we take the big calls, we'll think not of the powerful, but you. When we pass new laws, we'll listen not to the mighty but to you. When it comes to taxes, we'll prioritise not the wealthy, but you. When it comes to opportunity, we won't entrench the advantages of the fortunate few. We will do everything we can to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you.
>
> … As we leave the European Union, we will forge a bold new positive role for ourselves in the world, and we will make Britain a country that works not for a privileged few, but for every one of us. (May 2016)

May was seen as a 'safe pair of hands' by many (Coulson 2016; Hodges 2017). She was a seasoned politician, and she seemed to be moving away from the harsh austerity measures employed by Cameron and Osborne. This expectation was reinforced by a cabinet reshuffle that saw Osborne's ejection, although it has not necessarily been borne out in her actions as Prime Minister. Welfare has continued to be reduced and restructured.

Although many issues shaped the socio-economic conditions and political mood in Britain that led to the leave vote, the financial crisis of 2008 was undoubtedly a significant factor. This led the UK into the deepest recession it had faced since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and a conscious political move towards an austerity economy.

In many ways, the financial crisis was also the nail in the coffin for New Labour. There had long been suspicion about the Labour Party's ability to manage the country's finances, and indeed, each Labour government has left office amidst a financial crisis of some sort. As a consequence, the New Labour campaign of 1997 and the Party's early years in power had done much to attempt to restore its reputation through prudent spending. New Labour's negative image was only exacerbated by the events of 2008, however. There has been much discussion of the Labour Party's complicity in the financial crisis, which the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition were keen to highlight retrospectively. While Tony Blair has since

acknowledged that New Labour did not fully appreciate the potential threat that a deeply integrated global economy could pose to the UK's finances, Gordon Brown, who took over from him as Labour Prime Minister in 2007, has admitted that the party mis-handled financial regulation in the run up to the crisis (BBC 2011; Ross 2012). The Labour Party's financial reputation was further dented by the, now, notorious joke note left by Labour's treasury secretary for his successor which read 'Dear chief secretary, I'm afraid there is no money' (Owen 2010). To this day, the Party is still dogged by suspicions about their ability to manage the British budget.

When the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition came to power in 2010, one of the coalition's first actions was to announce an emergency budget. Spearheaded by George Osborne in his role as Chancellor of the Exchequer, these austerity measures included a £40 billion package of tax increases, welfare cuts, and public sector pay freezes (Onanuga 2010). This set a trajectory that the Conservative Party has followed ever since, leading the United Nations (UN) to raise serious concerns about the levels of inequality apparent in the UK. In fact, in 2016 the UN's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights went so far as to suggest that the country's austerity measures and welfare reforms could be in breach of its human rights obligations (Leszkiewicz 2016; Mortimer 2016). This was followed up in 2018 with comments from its poverty envoy that,

> [t]he UK government has inflicted "great misery" on its people with "punitive, mean-spirited, and often callous" austerity policies driven by a political desire to undertake social re-engineering rather than economic necessity. (Booth and Butler 2018)

Brexit, along with the election of Donald Trump as president of the USA, which happened less than five months later in 2016, are two events that have been much analysed as evidence of the rise of nationalism, populism and polarised politics – a marked change from the centrist approach of the late 1990s and 2000s which leaders such as Tony Blair and his New Labour Party subscribed to. Other parts of Europe, and, indeed, the world, are also witnessing a similar trend, with parties supporting anti-immigration and far-right agendas gaining increased support, as I discussed in the introduction. Along with the financial downturn and resultant austerity measures, other factors seen as contributing to this trend are rapid globalisation, 'the neoliberal economic and political project that has been underway in the

global north since the 1970s' (Gusterson 2017:210), and the transnational movement that comes with a globalised free market.

On the left too, there has been a move away from the centrist politics characteristic of the early 21st century in much of the Western world, leaving space for figures such as Bernie Sanders in the USA and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK (both linked to socialist thinking) to gain momentum as presidential candidates or opposition party leaders respectively. The latter was elected as leader of the Labour Party in Britain in 2015 with a whole movement, known as Momentum, building up to support him in response to widespread opposition to Corbyn within his own party. Just as right-wing populists look back towards notions of a better time for the nation and its citizens, Corbyn's Labour Party also draws on its past. It has returned to some of the Party's bread-and-butter issues promoting better welfare provisions, working conditions and an anti-austerity stance. Nationalisation is also on Corbyn's agenda, with regular calls for a re-nationalised rail network. Since his very first session of Prime Minister's Questions in Parliament, he has exemplified his populist approach by reading out questions from named members of the public on issues affecting them, such as a lack of affordable housing, benefit cuts and education in a bid 'to bring a new kind of politics to Westminster' (Corbyn 2016). All this raises questions about what value co-operativism holds in this era of shifting, and polarising political positions. Undoubtedly, the political climate in Britain and the almost 10 years of recession and austerity that helped to shape it, have created a powerful mix of hope, despair and apathy amongst its people.

Inevitably, as both the political and economic conditions in the UK have changed, so too has the situation for food co-ops. The four years after the food and financial crises of 2007-8 saw an upsurge in food co-op activity in Britain as many more people started to question the methods and values of the mainstream food and economic systems (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014:120). Media coverage of food co-ops also increased, including a four part TV programme on Channel 4 about a new, consumer food co-op called 'The People's Supermarket' set up in London in 2010 by a celebrity chef Arthur Potts Dawson to critique supermarkets and the mainstream global, industrial food system, while also improving access to 'good food' in an area with people on varying incomes (Wall to Wall Media 2011). For better or worse, David Cameron even paid a visit to the People's Supermarket in its early days.

This was part of the Conservative Party's bid to make co-operative values part of its Big Society initiative (Cameron 2007).

In 2007 a five-year project about food co-ops was also launched. This was headed up by Sustain – the alliance for better food and farming – to promote food co-op activity in England, as part of a larger Big Lottery-funded project – Making Local Food Work. In their final report Sustain estimated that there were at least 1,000 food co-ops in operation across the UK at that time (Sustain 2012). Their figures took into account food access-based co-ops and co-ops seeking alternatives to the dominant agri-food system.

As austerity started to bite, however, the funding landscape changed substantially, and this area of work seems to have been deprioritised. During fieldwork, I heard various stories from organisations that supported and promoted food co-ops and other community food initiatives about how other organisations with whom they had previously collaborated and co-operated had won funding in ways deemed a little devious in recent years. This included quietly submitting sole funding bids for ideas that had been worked on collectively. There were also frustrations about other organisations taking on work that they considered themselves better equipped to do. This has led to more individualised, competitive and more secretive working practices in some cases, although there is still a veneer of co-operation.

Many food co-ops have also had to adapt and respond to the shifting objectives of state and civil society funding streams (Caraher and Dowler 2014:10). Others have proved ephemeral, due to the constraints of the political-economic climate in which they operated, where funding was scarce and people were time poor.[22] Despite these changing times and conditions, however, Fareshares and St Hilda's still remain.

Shifting temporalities

Changing landscapes

Of the 26 or so food co-ops set up in Tower Hamlets since the late 1990s, today only a handful are still open, and St Hilda's has to be one of the most successful, operating without

[22] A trend that Vargas-Cetina argues is increasingly common within contemporary co-ops operating within the constraints and challenges of global capitalism and neoliberalism, where they attempt to adapt by changing form, size and structure or quickly cease operation due to the challenges of a changing political economic climate (2005).

interruption and continuing to expand. Nonetheless, the question of how much longer it will be going for is always on the minds of the centre's staff. The food co-op itself looks much the same as it did back in 2005. Every Thursday morning, an a-board on the street outside the centre announces that 'St Hilda's Food Co-op is here today! Fresh, local & organic fruit & vegetables on sale!' Inside, the wipeable tablecloths have been upgraded from black, white and gold to dark red and black. One corner of the hall now houses a tea and coffee area with jugs of hot water, mismatched mugs and often a few biscuits. Nearby a folding table is surrounded by chairs for volunteers and customers to take a break and chat. To the side of the hall, a noticeboard, covered with colourful images of fruit and veg, is one of the food co-op's only signs of existence at other times of the week. This holds information about the nutritional qualities of various fruits and vegetables, and details of how to volunteer. The stall also has similar signs with details of where the produce comes from, all laminated for easy care. The Older People's Project still sits in the room next door, and as a morning shift gets underway, the smells of cooking cabbage, chicken, gravy and other meals being served to the older people that day often waft through into the hall.

As for the volunteers, while some still come and go, due to short placements, finding other work or other interests, many choose to stay for substantial periods of time. In fact, the two longest-running volunteers with the project – Shirina and Arpan – had been there for around four and five years respectively when I was at the food co-op. Both were well known to many within the community centre.

Lourdes left the project, and the community centre in 2014, and there have been two subsequent coordinators, Helen, who only stayed for a brief period before Jenny, the current coordinator, took over. In the autumn of 2016, I met Lourdes at a hospice in East London, where she was working – still in the field of community development and volunteer services, but in relation to bereavement and dementia. She told me she missed the fresh fruit and

vegetables she used to get from St Hilda's. She reminisced,

> My kids took the piss out of me because I had a little trolley I'd take up to work for my weekly shopping. I do miss that because it was really good stuff and that was what was great. It was really nice food. And that's what I was proud of, really, selling that, and the impact it had on the social level…

Figure 11 St Hilda's Food Co-op Sign. Celia Plender, 2017.

Lourdes felt both surprised and proud that the food co-op had managed to continue for so long. From Lourdes' perspective, it had always been hard to keep it going in terms of the time she could commit to it (which involved a lot of juggling between her role as volunteer coordinator for the whole centre and as food co-op coordinator), the volunteers she was able to recruit, and the money the food co-op needed to get by. Even in the New Labour years, it could feel challenging to find money, she told me. With the election of the Conservative-

Liberal Democrat government in 2010, though, she felt that 'there was just this prevailing sense of doom. That we all kind of felt that no one would get this project or want to get it.' While there was still funding available for food co-ops one year on from the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition's election in 2010, by the time St Hilda's Local Food project money had finished in 2014, the situation was different, with funding options much reduced. This reflects the 'disproportionally large percentage of austerity cuts' that voluntary organisations have faced, which were estimated to be in the region of £1.7 billion between 2010-2017 before inflation (Land and King 2014:932).

The combination of rising living costs, a rise in precarious employment, falling incomes and aggressive cuts to welfare and public services enacted by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010-2015) and current Conservative Government had led to a situation in which millions of people in the UK were struggling to make ends meet. Inevitably this led to a further rise in food poverty, and one of its most visible manifestations was the growing number of food aid schemes. Benchmark budget standards used to measure income and welfare suggested at the time that 'those living at or below the minimum wage, or on state benefits, are increasingly unlikely to have sufficient money to meet basic needs, including food, irrespective of how well they 'budget, shop or cook' (Caraher and Dowler 2014:4). While the food co-ops set up under New Labour often targeted issues connected to income-related nutritional health, a lack of skills or local shopping facilities, today, food aid schemes predominantly focus on food poverty. Where many of the Third Way food co-ops of the mid-1990s-2000s represent a devolved, localised government strategy based on collaboration between communities and statutory bodies, more recent food aid initiatives have been based around models of charitable giving and philanthropy, reliant on individual citizens' compassion and charity, as I discuss further in chapter three.

St Hilda's Food Co-op, however, still continues to work with what it can in order to support people dealing with some of the impacts of austerity. The fact that it forms part of a wider institution (i.e. the community centre), has no doubt been significant in its ongoing existence. Since the Lottery money ran out, there have been times when the project has had little or no funding, and as Rupert acknowledged, it has become harder to find funding for the community centre and its projects. Nonetheless, at these times, the food co-op had been supported by the community centre, which has undoubtedly put pressure on its resources.

Like the food co-op's budget, Jenny the current coordinator's time was also tight when she first started. She was employed just one day a week at the centre, but regularly found responsibilities such as ordering the weekly fruit and veg, answering emails and doing admin spread into other days or evenings.

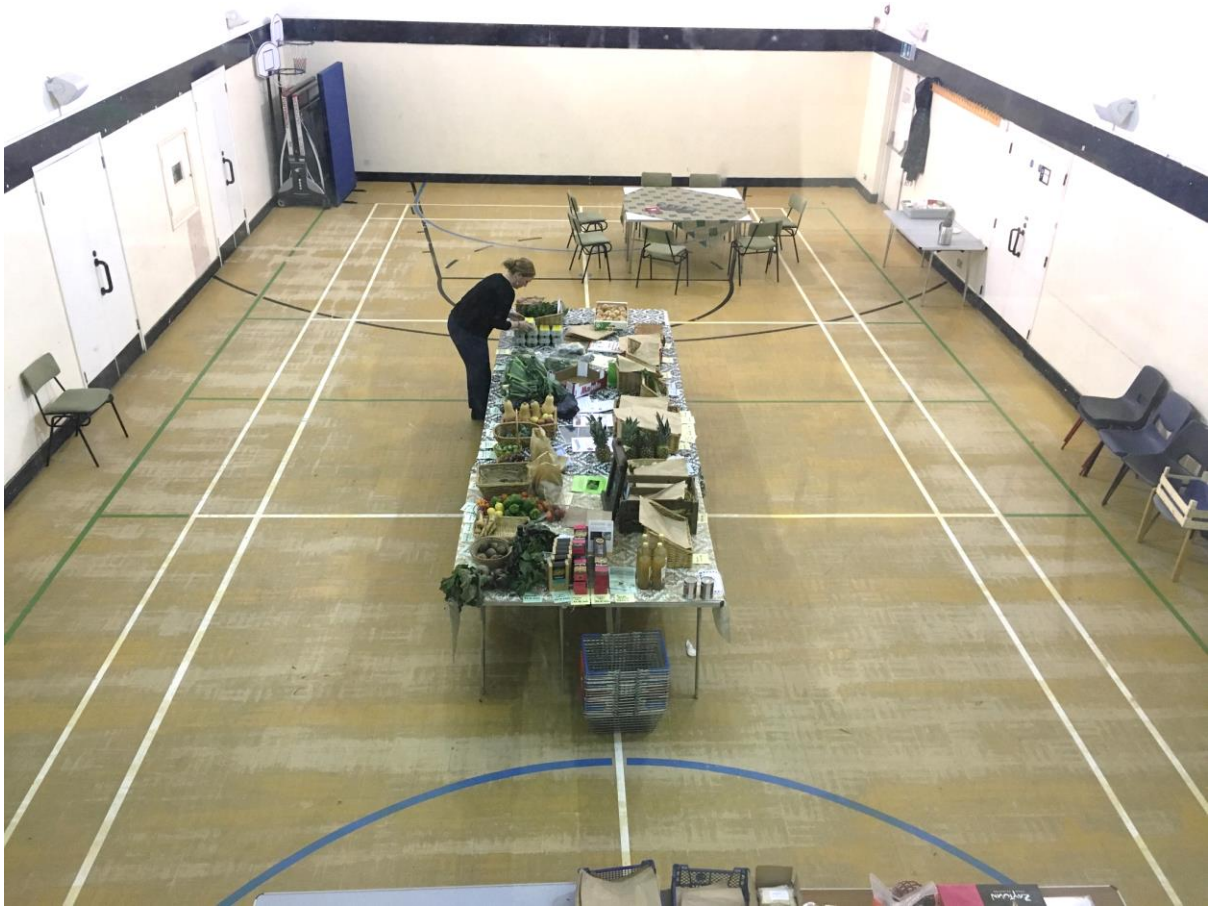


Figure 15 Setting up for the evening food co-op. Celia Plender, 2016.

Happily, the food co-op secured three years of funding for a food and advice project in 2016, though. The funding enabled Jenny to increase her employment at St Hilda's to four days a week, letting go of some of the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teaching work she had been doing at colleges and community projects in the local area. The food co-op expanded to two sessions a day on a Thursday – one in the morning and one in the evening. Each of these was accompanied by an accredited general advice service, which offered help with issues such as benefits, basic housing concerns and debt. At times there was also legal or financial advice on offer in the evenings. All of these extended services were based on the knowledge that there were many people in the area dealing with the consequences of austerity, and they were often further disenfranchised by age, disability or a lack of English

language skills. As with much of the country, advice services have also been subject to funding cuts and other resourcing issues, making what St Hilda's offered as a community centre, which works holistically on multiple needs within the community, all the more important. Thanks to the City Bridge Funding, the food co-op started offering healthy living cookery workshops again (some of which I hosted) and training including food hygiene and first aid, all of which were intended to contribute to healthy diets and employability. By the middle of this funding cycle, however, St Hilda's was inevitably already starting to think about where the next pot of money might come from, and how much they would have to adapt their offering to the priorities of that funder.

In terms of attitudes towards ethnic and racial diversity, much has also changed since the New Labour years. Since the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition came to power in 2010, there has been a shift towards a more hostile immigration environment. Popular and media perceptions about immigration have also changed, with migrants and ethnic minorities often being framed as a threat to jobs or a drain on British resources such as housing, welfare and the NHS, as Roger from the Older People's Project's comments demonstrated.[23] All this is undoubtedly compounded by the constraints that austerity has put on many people's lives. As racial and ethnic tensions become more fraught in the UK, especially in the wake of the Brexit referendum, St Hilda's stance on diversity and inclusion, in a project which attempts to build connections across difference, appears to be both evocative of a previous policy environment and deeply urgent in the current moment where divisions seem to be growing. Although less overtly political than Fareshares, in many ways, St Hilda's ethos becomes apparent in relation to the ways in which it supports people who are dealing with the impacts of the turbulent times that the political-economic changes of the past decade have caused in the UK. Arguably, in the face of rising poverty and increased racism and Xenophobia, responding to these issues through the services and the forms of sociality that St Hilda's attempts to provide and foster takes on a more political tone.

[23] Since 9-11, Islamophobia in the UK has also become more visible. This is, undoubtedly, a significant issue in an area such as Tower Hamlets, which houses the biggest Bengali community in Europe, as I will discuss further in chapter four.

Changing times and changing values

At Fareshares, too, the collective's members constantly negotiate issues around changing times and conditions. In the summer of 2017, I had the opportunity to meet with Martin Oddsocks and find out more about Fareshares' early history. True to form, he was wearing odd socks. Towards the end of our interview, a parcel delivery person knocked on the door, and when they asked for his name for their paperwork, it elicited some surprise. Martin reassured the delivery man that 'Oddsocks' really was his name, to which the man replied that he had never heard that surname before, and in his line of work he heard a lot. Within such a mundane and everyday interaction, the name felt incongruous. The delivery person seemed to see it as nothing other than an interesting quirk, unaware of the name's subversive qualities and history. Much like Martin's name, Fareshares also has the feel of something from another era with its colourful walls, bulk grain bins, and low-tech systems. The food co-op's history is also very much still a part of its make-up, as seen in its structures, stock and stated ideals.

Within the country itself, much has clearly changed in terms of the things that people are concerned about, have access to, and want to buy. Along with the issues of Brexit, precarity, migration and populism, climate change and the Anthropocene[24] fill newspaper headlines. Mainstream shops and supermarkets are now filled with the kinds of wholefoods, alternatives milks, organic and fairly-traded goods that have been Fareshares' mainstay for more than 30 years; and at times the supermarkets sell them at lower prices. Veganism is a rapidly growing trend, seen by some as an important form of food politics, animal welfare, or environmental action, and by others as 'lifestylism' or the latest fad diet (Hancox 2018a).

During my interview with Martin, I asked him what he thought Fareshares was for today. He replied that he had also been wondering about this. He reflected,

> People say that everything is of its time… but it wouldn't still be going if it was just a few hobbyists maintaining a tradition. So, it's obviously serving… addressing a need of some sort. I'm interested to know who values it now, because obviously lots of people do…

[24] This is a proposed epoch which is dated from the start of significant human impact on the earth's geology and ecosystems, including climate change.

Figure 12 Fareshares interior. Celia Plender, 2016.

Undoubtedly, as Martin said, many people do still value Fareshares and for all sorts of different reasons, ranging from ethical consumption-based to environmental or political. As I spoke to current members of Fareshares during my fieldwork, they also reflected on what the food co-op *was* and *should* be for. When I asked Holly, a more recent member of the collective who worked a Thursday evening shift with some other newer members in their 20s and 30s, she raised questions about how Fareshares could adapt to changing times and changing needs,

> I think we're just maintaining it how it was… I feel like, maybe the relevance has shifted, because from what I understand it really began from a group of people meeting a need and I know we're still meeting a need and people do still come here from far away because it's a really good place, but what need are we meeting locally? 'Cause the food is a bit cheaper, some of it, but not that much cheaper. I think… just figuring where it fits in now because, you know, there are shops… like in Totnes there's a new shop that's no packaging. Are we that? Do we want to try and be that? Do we want to try and update so we're like that and more people moving in here can

> recognise it as that and want to shop here? Because, I think some people might be a bit put off by the funny appearance and that kind of thing. Or are we like a vegan co-op? Or are we a community shop? I've been wondering about those things. If it's a community shop, should we be asking the community what they want to have here? I feel like that's the challenge and I don't know who's going to be the one to resolve that. We might need a new group of people to come in and sort it out… I don't know how the people who've been here for longer would respond to that conversation… to should we be trying to look different, should we be pushing this or that? I don't know.

She described it as being 'like a living museum' representative of a different era, in terms of its look, ethos and its practices. Like many of the younger members, one of Holly's key political motivations was climate change, and this was also one of the things that had drawn her to Fareshares. She also valued the project's anti-capitalist qualities, and the fact that it managed to keep going as an entirely volunteer-run, non-profit organisation. She did question how overtly political the food co-op was today, however. As she saw it, veganism had become so mainstream and trendy, and so had many of the products on sale in the food co-op, such as coconut oil or avocados – both readily available in supermarkets.

More than its left-wing politics, many of Fareshares' more recent (often younger) members seemed to be drawn to the project because of its ready supply of more affordable organic, fairly-traded and (for some) vegan foods. They also appreciated the co-ops' environmental stance in terms of the goods it stocked and its position on packaging, which required customers to bring their own shopping bags and containers to decant bulk goods into. This was also the site of much of their political action, whether based on individual acts of consumption (choosing local, organic, unpackaged or vegan goods, for example), entrepreneurialism in relation to ethical goods, or the choice of environmentally focused jobs of one sort or another. Where many of the older members were highly articulate about their political ideology, identifying their beliefs with the use of various 'isms', for the younger members, their politics was more often framed around specific issues – typically climate change, and, for some, growing inequality. The assertion of Fareshares anti- or alter-capitalist qualities was also often something that was kept vague in terms of people's articulations and assessments of the project.

Within the collective itself, only a few of the members would identify as anarchists today and others feel no great connection or commitment to some of the DIY or co-operativist elements of the project, such as collective decision making. Co-operation itself and its organisational structures could feel frustrating for some during my time there.

These frictions over changing times and members' values often became most evident in meetings or on the email list. If newer members did not fully see the logic or know the history of certain long-standing systems or if they felt that there was resistance to an idea that they put forward for what they saw as the benefit of the co-op, they could feel frustrated. For longer-running members, frustrations could be felt if they had the impression that something was being done impetuously without fully following consensual processes, showing a co-operative spirit or working out all the practicalities before taking action.

One meeting in which these generational tensions came to the surface, related to a new organic vegetable supplier. Hughes, the organic supplier that Fareshares had been working with for many years was no longer able to provide the co-op with as much fruit and veg as it used to, so, some work had been done to look into alternative options. As one newer member already had a relationship with a reliable company called Brockman's they offered to take on the responsibility for this order along with another newer volunteer. More than one member of the co-op then wrote an email with relevant information about what steps might need to be taken in order to set up a new supplier – ranging from details of how to get them added to Fareshares' payment system, how the delivery would be received – by a person or by giving the business a set of keys and the schedule for when the other veg orders come in and get unpacked so that the produce is checked off properly and refrigerated in good time.

Before the payment system was fully set up, or some of the other issues around how and who would take delivery had been resolved, the newer members started to place vegetable orders as they were concerned about ensuring that customers were getting a good enough supply. When these issues were raised first on the members' email list and then in a meeting, it was clear that both groups were feeling frustrated. The more established members were concerned about not being able to pay the supplier and how a new delivery could impact the people who might be expected to unpack the goods as they were not arriving in time with the shop's usual delivery and unpacking rhythms. The newer members had a sense that the

veterans were blocking them and that their behaviour showed a resistance to change. For a while this led to an impasse as the younger members decided to step down from the Brockman's order, feeling that everything had become too complicated. Once Brockman's had been added to the payment system, however, another member who had connections in both groups, decided to take on the order, which ran more or less smoothly from then on.

Although environmentalism and ethical forms of consumption had always been a part of the food co-op's remit, the interests of these younger members changed the balance between collectivity and individualism. Attempts at ethical citizenship made through the kind of work chosen and consumption choices made by this group, emphasised the role of sovereign subjects and their sense of spontaneous will in social or political change (Muehlebach 2012:49–50). This, then, made allusions to the 'individual moral adventure' that Ghosh refers to (2017:128–33). Performing these acts within a co-operative, though, and through acts of volunteering, make them appear less atomised or individualised, alluding to the fact that 'intense individualization and collectivization coexist' within contemporary society thanks to a moralising social order informed by neoliberal processes (Muehlebach 2012:49–50).

Reflecting on some of these generational tensions within Fareshares, Ed, a member in his 50s with a keen interest in co-operation who had been a member of the collective for over three years at the time of our discussion suggested,

> I think a lot of the skills and the assumptions that go into things like self-organisation have sort of atrophied or been eroded over the last 30 years. In 1980, I think about 80% of people were in trade unions and now I think it's about 10%. So… those skills and those assumptions about people being able to organise themselves have kind of gone and I'm not sure how you get those back, or how you support or encourage those. It feels like starting from a very low base.

Ed's comments highlight some of the ways in which the actions and events of previous eras have contributed to changing practices, ideals and subjectivities. Since the 1990s, there has been much academic speculation over the nature of politics in Western democracies, and whether we are living in a less political age in terms of participation in mainstream politics and everyday forms of political action (Mouffe 2005; Prosser and Stoker 2017). In his classic book, *Bowling Alone* (2001), Robert Putnam argues that many social ties and forms of civic

participation beyond the family, such as union activism, serving on local committees or attending public meetings, have declined in this period, doing much to erode a sense of community, civic participation (a crucial part of a healthy democracy) or 'social capital', while fostering a more individualised society. Others draw closer connections to neoliberalism, the subjectivities it has formed, and the way in which it has shaped civic participation through political projects such as the Third Way, while either dampening or co-opting aspects of their political energy (see for example Hyatt 2012).

In terms of activism, too, various scholars have identified a certain 'unwillingness on the part of individuals to subject themselves to collective structures, norms, or identities' (Sörbom and Wennerhag 2013:454). This, in turn, is thought to have led to individualised, lifestyle-focused forms of action, which reconfigure the relationship between the individual and society (ibid.). No doubt, the rise of the internet has also changed some of the means and modes of political action as new forms of digitally-networked communities develop and clicktivism becomes more popular.

It is unsurprising that these changes to means of organising would cause tensions for a space formed around the idea of co-operation – an inherently collective act. This highlights some of the frictions between individualism and collectivity apparent within the project and, perhaps, society. In some ways, both the people and the food co-op itself were negotiating different, yet overlapping temporalities, which did not always sit comfortably together. This could create a feeling of displacement or discomfort for those involved. While the newer members attempted to inscribe the future into the present through their focus on climate change (Bryant and Knight 2019:14), the longer-term members drew from the food co-op's past as well as the present processes that came as a legacy of this to think about how to deal with the present or imagine a different future. Whittier (1997) suggests that long-running social movements are often made up of different 'political generations'[25] who shape their activism around the ideologies and issues of different eras. While this intergenerationality can be an important factor in helping to keep the movement going, inevitably it also comes with

[25] Here I view generations a little differently to Mannheim, whose work Whittier draws on. Rather than simply taking into account the socio-historical environment of an activists' youth, I argue that the period in which someone becomes politically active and the forms of action they engaged with at that point all play a part in their relationship to, and outlook on, social organisation and activist methods.

challenges. This argument can also be extended to activist groups such as Fareshares, where I saw these same tensions playing out.[26]

Conclusions

In many respects, both Fareshares and St Hilda's East food co-ops are representative of specific political climates and responses to them. As time moves on, this leads to questions about whether to stay the same or adapt to changing times as well as societal, institutional and personal norms and ideals. Yet, along with the practicalities of the era in which these food co-ops are operating, they are also deeply embedded in the current moment, however tension-ridden or precarious this might be. Through the people who interact with each food co-op and the personal values and needs they bring with them, the projects are further moulded. As Rakopoulos (2017:51) puts it, co-operatives are 'peopled institutions' and the values of those involved imprint the food co-op with, at times, competing ideals and aspirations. The social world and ethos of a co-op cannot, therefore, be disentangled from those of its participants – their values, ideologies and experiences.

Clearly, what goes on *around* a co-operative is just as important as what goes on *within* it (ibid.), causing each food co-op's members to reflect on what forms of community building, activism or alternative economic activities they wish to shape their practices in relation to, and also how to survive. While many other food co-ops have proved ephemeral (Vargas-Cetina 2005) in the time that St Hilda's and Fareshares have been in operation, these two have managed to keep going, demonstrating both sustainability and adaptability to different times and conditions. Although St Hilda's has always had to be adaptable to keep up with changing interests of competitive funding regimes in the UK, Fareshares seems to be more conflicted about whether and how much to change.

Each food co-op's history also highlights aspect of the wider story of neoliberalisation within the UK, the forms of governmentality that successive political regimes have adopted in relation to citizenship, welfare and community, and the impacts that this has had on notions of collectivity, individuality, entrepreneurialism[27] and personal responsibility, which all play

[26] Within her work with worker-run collectives in Berlin in the 1980s, Müller (1991) also noted that 'the younger members did not have equally pronounced political intentions' suggesting that they 'were still trying to find' their political orientation and used their work with the collectives to develop this.

[27] Whereby individual citizens have to make choices about their lives and wellbeing and accept the risks associated with them (Masquelier 2017).

out within each food co-op. Through the histories of Fareshares and St Hilda's East and the political regimes they have shaped themselves in relation to, it is also possible to gain insights into the nature of food-based social and political action in the past 30 years, the relationship this has to the state, the market and capital, and how these have informed each food co-op's activities and discourses. While co-operatives have been a presence in every era since the movement's foundation in the mid-19th century, the issues they respond to, and therefore their countercultural qualities (Bauman 1976) are ever shifting. This raises questions about what it means to co-operate around food in an era of turbulent politics and economic instability, what constitutes political action today, and where its borders might lie.

Part two – Citizenship, aid and discourses of deservingness

Chapter two – Perceptions of poverty and welfare entitlement

Placing the East End and St Hilda's East

> *From where, off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage, set across with posts, gave menacing entrance on one end of Old Jago Street, to where the other end lost itself in the black beyond Jago Row; from where Jago Row began south at Meakin Street, to where it ended north at Honey Lane – there the Jago, for one hundred years the blackest pit in London, lay and festered…* (Morrison 2012 [1896]:11)

As I walked around the area surrounding St Hilda's East Community Centre during my fieldwork, it was often filled with tourists snapping pictures of the heavily graffitied walls and crumbling urban architecture of Shoreditch and Bethnal Green. Victorian brick railway arches and buildings stood side-by-side with the glass, concrete and polished metal of Shoreditch Overground station and the rows of corrugated steel shipping containers turned into pop-up shops. The colourful sights and smells of Brick Lane are another draw to the area as this is a hub of the Bengali community, which has had a substantial presence in east London since the 1960s.[28] Curry houses, Asian grocers and fabric shops, butt up against retro, second-hand clothing stores, independent cafés selling flat white coffees for £3.80 and boutique furniture shops where you would struggle to find anything for under a few hundred pounds. In nearby Spitalfields, 'Ripper tours' bring people to the area, a gruesome reminder of the infamous Victorian serial killer 'Jack the Ripper' who walked these streets in 1888, slashing the throats of working-class women before abdominally mutilating them. The East End has long been a place of fascination for visitors wishing to experience the sights and sensorial experiences of other people's lives, and its story is inextricably linked to themes of poverty, dereliction and ethnic diversity. The East End is also a significant site from which to explore changing perceptions of morality, aid and entitlement.

[28] Although there has been a presence of people from the Sylhet region of what is now called Bangladesh since the 18th century as I discuss further in chapter four.

I, therefore, use the East End as a starting point for this chapter, which engages with changing perceptions of poverty, citizenship and entitlement to aid within the frame of liberalism, social democracy and neoliberalism. I start in the East End, where St Hilda's community centre finds its origins,[29] in order to explore the significant changes to living conditions and demographics that industrial capitalism and urbanisation were causing in the 19th century, and how citizens and the state responded to this. Here I look at the forms of morality and ideals of citizenship this fostered in terms of state aid and middle-class charity, along with the ways in which the co-operative and settlement movements positioned themselves within these discourses, pushing back against some of the hierarchical and individualist values inherent in a liberal moral economy. I, then, engage with the development of the welfare state, what catalysed this, how it changed values of citizenship, and created certain discourses of deservingness that accompanied a more equal entitlement to aid. Finally, I look at the post-2010 punitive turn in terms of welfare provision, the ways in which this has impacted on public discourses and the personal experiences of participants at Fareshares and St Hilda's East, again, drawing this back to the co-operative and its countercultural properties within such an atmosphere.

By the mid-19th century, the East End of London was 'the largest impoverished urban enclave in the world' (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:1), a working-class area, where many lived in extremely harsh conditions. This developed in 'symbiotic differentiation' with its neighbour, the City of London – the historic centre of the city, turned financial hub (ibid.). At first, the East End provided the city's food, later it housed the polluting trades deemed undesirable within its walls. Collectively, the two areas became integral to the British imperial trading system, with the City buying and selling goods and the East End distributing them through its docks. This made east London a destination for people from all over Britain, and from many other countries. As the City thrived economically, the contrast between the two became all the more apparent. So did the East End's dependence on the City for income, work and charitable donations (ibid. 2006:1). Over time, the East End 'became a symbol of a nation's

[29] I contextualise Elephant and Castle, where Fareshares is based, further in chapter four, along with further exploration of the contemporary dynamics of the East End in relation to changing demographics, conceptions of community and forms of conviviality.

dark side, shaped by divisions of class, ethnicity, race and gender' (Eade 2001:124), which was both fascinating and shocking to the middle classes of the Victorian era (1837-1901).

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th century onwards saw dramatic socio-economic changes in Britain, and these did much to impact urban living conditions and perceptions of poverty. In the 19th century, Britain's cities were expanding rapidly, and the urban population had become larger than that of the countryside for the first time. Many working-class people were living in overcrowded housing, on low wages with poor diets and little job security (de Pennington 2011). While some in the middle classes could move out to more leafy suburbs, workers were packed tightly into industrial, inner-city areas, close to their sites of work. Within these urban environments '[s]moke and cesspools, lack of drainage and open sewers, bred environmentally caused diseases to which all were subject' (Fraser 2002:7).

The social support networks associated with previous, typically hierarchical and often rural, working arrangements had also been eroded in urban areas by the structures of industrial capitalism. As Fraser (2002:6) puts it, '[t]he factory owner had the privilege of the old lord of the manor but none of the responsibility. The cash nexus of employment had replaced the paternalism of connection or interest groups'. As a consequence, many feared changes in circumstance such as injury, illness or the impacts of old age.

Amongst middle-class Victorians there was much curiosity about the lives of the poor, and many questions about the causes of poverty (de Pennington 2011; Fraser 2002). This curiosity manifested itself in various ways including an interest in 'slumming' (i.e. visits to and stays in deprived areas). In fact, by the 1890s, well-known philanthropic institutions based in slums were even listed in London guidebooks amongst shops, monuments and other entertainment spots (Koven 2004:1). Much was written about the East End including extensive newspaper coverage of slum life, sociological studies and novels (such as Charles Dicken's mid-19th century social commentaries). The hardship in Bethnal Green, in particular, was described in Friedrich Engels' 1844 book *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, where he quotes the vicar of St Philip's Church,

> …if we make ourselves acquainted with these unfortunates, through personal observation, if we watch them at their scanty meal and see them bowed by illness and want of work, we shall find such a mass of helplessness and misery, that a nation like

> ours must blush that these things can be possible. I was rector near Huddersfield [a northern industrial town] during the three years in which the mills were at their worst, but I have never seen such complete helplessness of the poor as since then in Bethnal Green. (Engels 2009 [1844]:73)

Figure 13 Old Nichol Street today. Celia Plender, 2017.

The Victorian interest in poverty also extended to a whole genre of 'slum fiction'. Amongst its most celebrated works was Arthur Morrison's 1896 book *A Child of the Jago,* which was based on the Old Nichol slum – the most notorious slum in the East End, which Morrison called the 'Jago'. This is a tale of abject poverty, vice and violence in which those in the grips of the Jago have little chance of ever escaping their unforgiving living conditions aside from in a coffin. It is on the former site of the Old Nichol that St Hilda's East Community Centre stands today – and its story is also tied to Victorian perceptions of poverty, morality and of charity. St Hilda's East was founded in 1889, as part of the British Settlement Movement, which set up 'colonies of learning and fellowship' in poor urban areas in which working- and middle-class people came together.

While other well-known East End settlement communities such as Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel and Oxford House in Bethnal Green, were set up by educated men from smart Oxford University colleges, St Hilda's East was founded by a group of women. They were all former pupils of Cheltenham Ladies College, a smart school for girls aged 11-18 in Gloucestershire, South West England. The London centre was named St Hilda's East, in reference to St Hilda's Hall and College at the University of Oxford and Cheltenham Ladies College respectively (Beauman 1996:86–7; see also Phillips 2010).

St Hilda's East was intended to be 'a community of people bound together in the service of the poor' (St Hilda's East Community Centre: The Story of a Community 2010); a place where 'social problems may be studied and the necessary support given to those prepared to devote themselves to working out reforms amongst women and children' (ibid.). They were to be given help to enable them to 'help themselves' (Beauman 1996:87).

Figure 14 Inside St Hilda's original building on Old Nichol Street. Source: https://sthildaseastmemories.wordpress.com

Perceptions of poverty, charity and co-operation

In the mid-19th century, poverty was seen as a moral issue with the poor to blame for their own situation. This period was underpinned by ideals of liberalism and Benthamite utilitarian individualism whereby 'the common good was really the sum of the self-interest of every member of society' (Fraser 2002:8). A belief in self-help inspired by Samuel Smiles, in which people should find their own salvation was also prominent. If the state's interaction with the market should be laissez-faire, as liberalist thinkers such as Adam Smith famously suggested, then within these logics, it should also leave welfare alone as much as it could (although there would still be some provision), letting citizens attend to their own self-interest and develop their own coping strategies where possible. According to utilitarian philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, an over protective state would only weaken individual citizen responsibility (ibid. 2002:111–2) – sentiments which still feel familiar in the contemporary period in the words of politicians such as Margaret Thatcher and Jack Straw discussed in chapter one, or in post-2010 austerity Britain discussed below.

In the vein of self-help and citizen responsibility, the poor law, which offered aid to those in difficulty,[30] was amended in 1834 to reduce the amount of financial relief on offer, while placing a greater emphasis on the role of the workhouse in rehabilitating the poor. This was a place where people who were unable to support themselves were housed and put to work in harsh, prison-like conditions. These were intended to be worse than the lowest living conditions for someone in work in order to deter people from relying on state provision (de Pennington 2011). The reform of the poor law also changed the nature of citizenship for the poor. Where state aid had previously been part of their fundamental rights, then this more punitive version of the poor law required them to give up their 'civil right to personal liberty, by internment in the workhouse' (Marshall 2006 [1950]:33). On entering the workhouse, they also 'forfeited by law any political rights they might possess' (ibid.).

The 19th century was also an era in which the charity sector boomed and humanitarian acts were commonplace amongst the middle classes (Fraser 2002:135–6). Parry argues that the rise of charitable giving in a free-market economy is a consequence of liberalism itself. As he

[30] The Poor Law had been in place in England since 1601. During the 19th century, though, it was becoming increasingly expensive for the state to operate due to rapid population growth and the social impacts of industrialisation and urbanisation.

puts it, 'free and unconstrained contracts in the market also make free and unconstrained gifts outside of it' (Parry 1986:466). These gifts represent everything that the market is not, a response to the socially dis-embedded nature of economic relations, making humanitarian acts the natural partner of liberalism, despite their seeming opposition (1986:466; see also Muehlebach 2012:20–22). The liberal subject, therefore, depended on a dual ontology of rational, utilitarian self-interest *and* fellow-feelings, such as care, compassion and solidarity (Muehlebach 2012:20). As such, as capitalism developed, it was accompanied by a 'new humanitarian sensibility' (ibid. 2012:22). Again, a meaningful context to consider in relation to the motivation of food co-operative members and the post-2010 rise in emergency food aid schemes in the UK – both of which I explore further in chapter three.

The values of the Victorian era (1837-1901), and in particular those of the middle-classes, included a mix of hard work, thrift, respectability and self-help. Fraser argues that while a propensity to work and save fed into Britain's prosperity as an industrial nation, respectability provided many Victorians with 'a sensitivity to suffering, a concern for others, which compelled people to engage with the lives of others less fortunate than themselves' (2002:138–9). This and the ideals they held around respectability gave middle-class Victorians the moral imperative to pull others out of vice, and instil the values of 'self-help' into the poor. This would then lead working-class people to better their own lives.

Hundreds of charitable institutions of one kind or another were set up in urban slum districts in the 19th century, and these were visited by a whole host of donors, trustees, paid workers and volunteers. Koven suggests that, for many philanthropists, visiting or living in such places was 'a way to do penance for the sins of their class, to investigate and study the poor, and to succor them' (2004:5). Anyone with an interest in working on issues of social welfare felt compelled to visit urban areas of deprivation, whether through social scientific research, philanthropy, state or church duties.

Clearly the work of the St Hilda's East settlers, makes sense within these logics of middle-class aid, compassion and values of self-help. In this spirit, the settlers were confident that education and instilling the working classes with the 'moral, spiritual, and aesthetic values' that capitalisms' emphasis on economic concerns had denied them, would help to improve their lives (Scheuer 2011). The settlers also attempted to counterpose aspects of a liberal

ethos, however. They rejected models of charity which they believed to be purely palliative, and attempted to foster greater feelings of connection between people from different backgrounds, believing that interactions across difference would be beneficial to both.

As Fraser (2002:147) suggests, the movement 'gave to a generation of young humanitarians invaluable personal contact with poverty and exposed to many [of them] the practical fallacies of the individualist ideology' associated with the liberal and utilitarian belief that everyone has an equal opportunity to 'help' themselves. Through this education about the lives of the poor, the settlers worked to improve local conditions for the people in their communities; some also attempted to address welfare more broadly by campaigning for social reform – therefore calling into question the rights of citizens and the responsibilities of the state (Beauman 1996:xix).

The co-operative movement also came into being within this liberal environment. While the co-operative movement's practices still chimed with an ethic of self-help, hard work and thrift (Weber 2012), first wave co-operators eschewed the individualism of the liberal ethos. The models of charity and philanthropy most common in the Victorian era reinforced social hierarchies between elite patrons and less affluent recipients of aid. While they 'succoured' the working classes enough for their survival, they also kept them firmly in their place, making it clear what the social order of things should be (Fraser 2002). Through practices of mutual aid, in which each person is able to help and also be helped (Kropotkin 2014 [1902]), co-operators also reconfigured the structures of aid. These practices and the less hierarchical structures of decision making that the co-operative used, offered an opportunity to empower and educate working class people. It enabled them to imagine alternatives to the structures of society, their access to resources such as food, and their relationship to the market. Where the Settlers attempted to call the state to account through social reform, the co-operative movement attempted to build its own system of social security instead, outside of state structures of poverty relief.

First wave co-operative societies also differed considerably from some other 18th and 19th century experiments into better worker conditions, rights and access to food such as Robert Owen's New Lanark cotton mill, which I discussed in the introduction, or the more benign form of capitalism practiced by the Quaker George Cadbury in his chocolate factory. By

contrast, the co-operative did not rely on a top-down model of benevolence, morality and education. Instead, these co-ops were set up *by* and *for* working-class people to attend to their own living conditions and needs.

Changing entitlement and the foundation of the Boundary Estate

Into the 1870s, the economic boom of the industrial eras seemed to be coming to an end, giving way to a period of depression that worsened in the 1880s and '90s. The national economic downturn and the work of charities, humanitarians and social reformers, laid bare some of the conditions of life in poverty. The poverty mapping work of social reformer Charles Booth in London and confectionary manufacturer and Quaker, Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree York was particularly significant. Both suggested that as much as 30% of the population in each city was living in poverty – including wage earners. These were figures that many middle-class people found shocking (Renwick 2017:42–6). This led them to question whether everyone *was*, in fact, benefitting from Britain's industrial might and 'an unfettered free market' (Boughton 2018:17).

Poverty increasingly came to be connected with social and economic circumstances rather than pure immorality. As a consequence, in the late-19th century, attitudes and practices in relation to state welfare seemed to be changing. While people were still expected to help themselves, there was an acknowledgement that those deemed morally worthy might need some assistance with structural constraints in order to start taking the first steps towards self-improvement.

According to Dench et al. (2006:1), from the mid-19th century, up until the formation of the post-Second World War welfare state in Britain, the East End was a 'breeding ground for social policy ideas and visionary thinking.' With 'analysis of East End conditions' providing much of the background work for the implementation of a welfare state. This was also the site of one of the first council-run social housing schemes in the UK, known as the Boundary Estate, which replaced the Old Nichol Slum (London Borough of Tower Hamlets 2007:4).

In the late 19th century, almost 6,000 people lived in the 30 or so streets of the Nichol. Its tenement buildings were blackened and decaying with poor sanitation. Within them, tenants were packed cheek by jowl into every room possible, including the windowless basements. The annual mortality rate was double the average in London, and for many of its residents,

the Nichol was ‘the final stopping-off point before entry into the dreaded workhouse’ (Wise 2008:10). By 1887, the Old Nichol had garnered so much attention that it was becoming a ‘national embarrassment’ deemed worthy of a public inquiry (Wise 2008:10). This, in combination with the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act, which gave local authorities permission to clear slums, eventually led to its demolition.

The Boundary Estate was to be a ‘picturesque urban village’ where its inhabitants could improve and prosper, becoming upright and moral citizens (Durlacher 2012). This was reflected in its design, which included a raised central garden built from the rubble of the Old Nichol, and wide tree-lined streets containing the attractive five-story, red- and yellow- brick tenement buildings that made up the estate. Each of these was individually designed in the style of the Arts and Crafts movement[31] and named after villages along the River Thames (Guardian staff 2016; Boughton 2018:21).

[31] This movement was championed by people such as artist and social thinker John Ruskin and textile designer and socialist William Morris. The movement promoted traditional arts and crafts in response to the ills of industrialisation, which were seen by the movement to be eroding the moral and social health of the nation as well as its aesthetic values.

Figure 15 Clifton House on the Boundary Estate, opposite St Hilda's current site. Celia Plender, 2017.

While the Boundary Estate may have been a significant symbol of a changing popular and statutory vision of welfare and poverty, it was still not necessarily open to all. Instead, like many of the early housing estates, it was aimed at 'skilled members of the working classes… who were judged amenable to "moral improvement" through moving them from slums and replanting them in more bucolic and refined surroundings' (Hyatt 2012:163). The Boundary Estate was an 'arena' in which the state was able to envision and attempt to implement particular visions of citizenship (Koch 2018:34), grounded in a strong work ethic and the perceived moral fortitude that this alluded to (Weber 2012 [1905]).

Members of what Victorians referred to as the 'residuum' – the people who had been left behind by the changing economy had little chance of living in such places (Berlin in Guardian staff 2016; de Pennington 2011). These included many slum dwellers who made their livings either as costermongers and street hawkers, selling fruits, vegetables or other goods, or through washing and sewing, doing odd jobs or petty crime. At the Boundary Estate, few, if any, of the 5,719 people evicted from the Old Nichol were able to move into the new estate

as the rents were around double that of the slum.[32] So, the Nichol's residents moved on, instead, to other slum dwellings in the area.[33]

Nonetheless, the construction of the Boundary Estate marked the beginning of a different era of state welfare provision and of public expectation. As welfarism continued to develop in the 20th century, issues pertaining to the social contract in place between the state, the citizen and the market, as well as the responsibilities of each, continued to be considered.

The implementation of the welfare state

As Hobsbawm suggests, '[t]he history of government economic policy and theory since the Industrial Revolution is essentially that of the rise, fall and revival of *laissez-faire*' (1999:204). And these shifts in theory and economic conditions have also done much to inform welfare thinking and provision. The period between 1914 and 1945 saw two World Wars and a severe worldwide economic depression, all of which contributed to a shift away from a Victorian laissez-faire model of capitalism towards a more state-regulated era of economic policy. Hand in hand with this came increased welfare provision as the war effort required a healthy economy and healthy citizens.

If the First World War (1914-1918) led to state control of various industries, services and trade arrangements, and a greater provision of welfare, then this interventionist approach continued in the interwar period with various aspects of industry and infrastructure being brought into national ownership or management.[34] In 1931, Free Trade – the backbone of British liberalism – was also abandoned in favour of more protectionist trade agreements. Thanks to its central role in the rise of industrial capitalism and the sale of goods and services, Free Trade had previously been useful to Britain. As other countries started to become more competitive, however, and also implemented various tariffs, Britain started to lose its edge. Many of the export oriented industries so prevalent in the 19th century also collapsed after

[32] Different accounts give numbers varying from none (Durlacher 2012) to 11 former Nichol tenants (Haines 2008).

[33] This also reflected a belief on the part of housing reformers that they should not build to meet the rents and standards of the poorest accommodation. Instead, they hoped for a 'filtering up' process whereby the people moving into municipal housing would make slightly better quality homes available for those in the worst dwellings. As such, everyone would have the opportunity to move up. The persistence of slums challenged this theory, however (Boughton 2018:23).

[34] This saw the amalgamation of the whole of the rail network in 1921, the partial nationalisation of the electricity supply in 1926 and the gradual government monopolisation of steel, iron and coal from the early-1930s onwards – all key components of British industry (Hobsbawm 1999:204–19).

the First World War, while industries oriented towards domestic use became more significant (Hobsbawm 1999:219–23).

The Great Depression of the 1930s further identified the shortcomings of laissez-faire, and its belief that the market could always right itself without external intervention. The long-term ill health and unemployment that the depression caused led to a greater acknowledgement that such conditions were not purely personal issues; they impacted on the health of the economy as a whole (Renwick 2017a:8). The Second World War moved Britain further in this direction to what Hobsbawm describes as 'the most state-planned and state-managed economy ever introduced outside a frankly socialist country' (1999:224). While some controls were dismantled after the war (as they had been with World War One), others were maintained or further nationalised, such as the Bank of England, the airline and the supply of gas and electricity.

The two World Wars also did much to shape social attitudes and expectations in terms of state welfare in Britain. The Second World War (1939-1945), in particular, is seen to have instilled 'a spirit and practice of universalism' into the country, which shaped social policy as well as the public imaginary (Fraser 2002:228). This was seen as a 'people's war' and its success was dependent not only on the country's professional military personnel, but on the whole nation. Everyone was expected to pitch in irrespective of gender or class, thereby, reconfiguring relationships, perceived rights, responsibilities and status.

If citizens were not going off to fight, then they should take up work in the factories and fields that fed the war effort, volunteer with the Home Guard, which stood ready to defend the nation in the event of an invasion, produce food, use resources frugally, share whatever might be needed for the war effort, and host evacuees from urban centres which were being bombed. In return each would receive 'fair shares' of rationed resources (Hobsbawm 1999:224). Even the Royal Family were subjected to rationing (Fraser 2002:229), and Princess (now Queen) Elizabeth, joined the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service, and trained as a driver and mechanic. As a consequence, 'the nation accepted limitless sacrifices in the war effort in return for an implied promise of a more enlightened, more open post-war society', in which entitlement to health and wellbeing were expected to be open to a broader spectrum of people (Fraser 2002:228).

When World War Two came around, the depression of the 1930s, the mass unemployment it had caused and the cuts to unemployment benefits implemented by the state at that time were still fresh in people's minds. This situation was seen as something that should not be repeated. Instead, here was an opportunity for a more inclusive vision of post-war reconstruction (Fraser 2002:228; see also Hobsbawm 1999:220 on post-World War One cuts).

Following an enquiry set up by the War Ministry,[35] the *Social Services and Allied Services* report was published in 1942. This is said to have been instrumental in the foundation of the welfare state that emerged in post-Second World War Britain. In what came to be known as the Beveridge Report, economist William Beveridge proposed a form of social insurance which saw the implementation of 'cradle-to-grave' provision in exchange for a flat-rate, weekly contribution from anyone who had a job. All this was intended to put an end to poverty by working on what Beveridge called the 'five giants' of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. Beveridge's proposals worked to rationalise existing social insurance schemes, add new ones such as financial assistance with funerals, and to make all of these benefits more universal in both coverage and contributions. It reflected the values of social cohesion and universalism apparent within the war effort, while proposing to live up to the post-war promise of rewards that would make up for wartime sacrifices.

The society it envisioned was one in which financial benefits were available to those who needed them, but where few should actually have that level of need anymore because living conditions would be better and employment more available. The report proved popular with the public, selling over half a million copies (Fraser 2002:236–239; Renwick 2017a:1–9). Dench et al. argue that Beveridge's vision also appealed to many working-class people as 'it seemed to reflect or even embody many traditional working-class practices' of reciprocal support and shared risk, which are also apparent within the co-operative movement. 'What Beveridge appeared to do was to take these mechanisms of self-help and mutuality and make them more viable by inserting them into state schemes backed by vastly greater material resources' (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:106).

[35] This was a coalition between the ruling Conservative Party and the Labour Party, set up in 1940. Both parties agreed to put aside their political divisions to work jointly on the war effort.

While the Beveridge report may not have been taken up wholesale by the Labour government who implemented state welfare from 1945 onwards, it, and the bitter memory of post-World War One economic conditions and inequalities, did help to shape public demands. By 1946, Labour had implemented a National Insurance system whereby employees made compulsory payments which could then be used as relief for unemployment, sickness, old age and death. By 1948, a National Health Service offering universal, free healthcare was in place. Other acts addressed housing, education, industrial accidents and various other issues. Through the implementation of the welfare state, Hobsbawm argues that the UK came to have 'a greater variety of social security services and a more complete coverage than any nation in Europe', and at a relatively low cost to the public purse (Hobsbawm 1999:226).

Here then was a state and society that looked rather different to that of the 19th century, which had governed from a greater distance, while encouraging individualised practices of profit, aid and care. Instead, the welfare state acted as 'society's cement', it was the 'visible expression of the invisible bond uniting living men in the same society' (Donzelot 1993 in Muehlebach 2012:41). It was a system that acknowledged interdependence, as each citizen was both responsible for and entitled to mutual protection against collective risk (Muehlebach 2012:41). This was enacted through benefits and services provided by the state, and a mixture of national insurance and taxes to be paid for by each working citizen.

Rather than a system of 'hand outs', this was, therefore, a reciprocal social contract between the state, citizens and business (Renwick 2017a:9). It was 'a project that integrated different aspects of social, political and economic life with the aim of making Britain fit for the challenges of the modern world' (Renwick 2017a:7). In so doing, it would further facilitate both capitalism and industrialism.

The idealised citizen of the welfare state was the 'worker-citizen, who had paid his 'debts' to society through contributions in labour and taxes, as well as military service in the Second World War' (Koch 2018:41). While the state welfare worked 'under the master narrative of a class and intergenerational solidarity', however, many scholars have pointed out that the idealised worker-citizen was, in fact, an ethnic majority, male worker who was part of a nuclear family (Muehlebach 2012:46; Koch 2018:41). In line with this, the state focussed its

sense of public responsibility for the care of the nation on work, health and education, while the issue of domestic care continued to be the private domain of women.

The general consensus between the political parties about the need to provide state welfare, lasted through the 1950s and '60s despite the Labour Party's defeat in 1951. As a consequence, it became 'deeply embedded in the British political and social culture', developing 'deep roots, which it would be both difficult and electorally dangerous for any party to seek to disturb or prune' (Fraser 2002:265). Following on from the post-war austerity of the late 1940s, the '50s and '60s was a period of 'full employment' and 'mass affluence' in the UK, which further helped to forge this connection with the welfare state.[36]

Nonetheless, throughout this period, the welfare state still had its detractors, leading to regular critiques in the mainstream media. Within these '[i]individualism, freedom, and liberty were depicted as opposed to the stifling bureaucratic ineptitude of the state apparatus and oppressive trade union power' (Harvey 2007:56–7). By the 1960s, such criticisms had become more widespread within political circles and the general public, and as the economy went into decline in the 1970s, they increased further. This was not helped by the fact that spending on the welfare state grew more rapidly than the economy as a whole from the late 1940s to the late 1970s (Fraser 2002:268).[37] Combined with issues of economic stagnation, rising inflation and substantial unemployment in the mid-1970s, this created an opportunity for liberal economic and welfare practices to get underway. This period also saw greater scrutiny over how the benefit system was being used, and abused. Arguments were made about how welfare arrangements were overly generous towards certain groups within society. Within the press, stories started to emerge about people who were managing to scam the system by working and signing on, or avoiding taxation through cash-in-hand jobs, thus undermining the basic principle of a reciprocal system of contributions as well as benefits. Fraser (2002:281) suggests, however, that cases may not have been as common as the media implied.

[36] In many ways, it was the Fordist structures of work, leisure, production and consumption that resulted from post-war reform that the countercultural food co-ops of the 1960s and '70s formed themselves in relation to.
[37] Factors contributing to this included the baby booms of the late 1940s and 1960s and increased life expectancy, leading to a larger population requiring welfare support.

Although things had already started to change with the Labour government in power before Margaret Thatcher's election, her appointment as Prime Minister of the Conservative Party in 1979 still profoundly changed the course of industry, and of welfare. Indeed, since that time 'successive welfare reforms have fundamentally reworked the contract between state and citizen, changing both what is offered to individuals in social security support and what is demanded in return' (Patrick 2017:4). Each successive government since the late 1970s has taken Britain a little further along its neoliberal trajectory as I discussed in chapter one.

'Skivers' and 'strivers'

> *The benefit system has created a benefit culture. It doesn't just allow people to act irresponsibly, but often actively encourages them to do so. Sometimes they deliberately follow the signals that are sent out. Other times, they hazily follow them, trapped in a fog of dependency. But either way, whether it's the sheer complexity and the perverse incentives of the benefits system, whether it's the failure to penalise those who choose to live off the hard work of others, or whether it's the failure to offer the right support for people who are desperate to go back into work, we've created the bizarre situation where time and again the rational thing for people to do is, quite clearly, the wrong thing to do.* (Cameron 2011a)

From the very beginning, the welfare state came with a set of rules, regulations and institutions, and each of these worked to reinforce a certain vision of society, its hierarchy and the kinds of citizens fit to live in it. This was most evident in the identification of who was included and excluded from the state benefits and services on offer (Renwick 2017a:8). In itself, the decision to implement an insurance scheme which people had to pay into, rather than receive a universal allocation, set a specific tone. This privileged the notion of worker-citizens over the idea of equal entitlement for all. Despite the aspirations of universalism felt in the war, this system, therefore, 'excluded those unable to contribute, and hence to pay their debts, as 'undeserving' of the state's attention' (Koch 2018:41). While women were generally dependent on their husbands for post-war welfare benefits, aside from the Family Allowance, other social groups such as the long-term unemployed, the ill and immigrants, were excluded from the social insurance scheme. Instead they had to turn to the more stigmatising forms of means-tested social assistance or philanthropists (Koch 2018:41).

Some aspects of the benefits system were also scrutinised, with various commentators showing concern for the negative impacts these could have on the economy and the moral character of benefit recipients. And much like today, unemployment benefits garnered the most attention (Renwick 2017a:7). With this, another binary was created between those perceived to be taking from the system without fulfilling their obligation to also contribute to the social insurance scheme and worker-citizens who did contribute. This worked to the detriment of the worker-citizens, the 'strivers', who were seen to be contributing their hard-earned wages, while the 'skivers' unfairly benefitted. This, therefore, raised questions about whether the welfare system was unfairly privileging the 'underclasses' over the ideal worker-citizen (Hills 2017).[38] This is a trope still prevalent in British society today as David Cameron's words attest.

Since the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition came to power in 2010, the provision of welfare and the impacts of austerity have been significant topics of public and political discourse. In the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis, the Labour Party, then in power, attempted to tackle the resultant recession through fiscal stimulation; but when they lost the 2010 general election, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government that replaced them took a difference stance, attempting to reduce the economic deficit as rapidly as they could through welfare reform and cuts to public spending. This introduced 'caps to entitlement and increased conditionality' in social security provision as well as 'an ethos of individualised risk' (Lambie-Mumford 2017:1), reminiscent of 19th century laissez-faire.

Cameron's words, which formed part of a speech about the welfare reforms implemented in 2011, clearly highlighted perceived faults within the system, as well as within the British public, where people, by choice or by accident, were taking advantage not only of the structures in place, but also of their fellow citizens. His words once again evoked the social contract between the state and the citizen and the perceived negative impact welfare could have on personal productivity, by creating a culture of dependency.

They also acted as a reminder of the perceived threat of the 'benefit scroungers' or 'skivers' who were working the system for their own gain (and potentially having a very pleasant life

[38] The reality is much more complex, of course, with a focus on the likes of unemployment obfuscating the ways in which a broad spectrum of people benefitted from the welfare system through facilities, such as free healthcare, schooling and state pensions (Hills 2017).

while doing so) rather than genuinely being in need of assistance. Here, those living with poverty are framed as responsible for their own situation due to the personal choices they have made in relation to their lives, consumption habits and questionable ethics. As such, they are seen to be undeserving of sympathy or of aid (McKenzie 2015:12; see also Williams 2013; Patrick 2017).

While these issues significantly impacted the lives of some of the people participating at Fareshares and St Hilda's East, the changing climate in relation to state welfare regimes, neoliberal capitalism, and forms of inequality also highlight the context in which food co-ops are attempting to operate today. This raises questions for them about their own practices and conceptualisations of mutual aid (as I discuss in chapter three), place and identity-based inequalities (chapter four) and work (chapter five). The changes discussed here also offer a contextual backdrop to British cultural perceptions of poverty and inequality that I discuss below in relation to the experiences of participants at Fareshares and St Hilda's East food co-ops.

Clearly, these narratives of deserving and dependence are not new. Aside from the 19th century rhetoric of vice and immorality discussed above, Thatcher spoke of the 'cycles of deprivation' which were holding back benefit recipients from bettering their lives, while the New Labour government suggested that the poor were excluding themselves from society due to their 'bad behaviour' (McKenzie 2015:9). Each also talked about the need for active rather than passive citizens who were motivated to work rather than rely on the benefits system (Hills 2017:4–5).

As for Cameron, building on the report *Breakdown Britain* published in 2006 by the right-wing think tank the Centre for Social Justice, he argued that Britain was 'broken' (McKenzie 2015:9–11). The report highlighted 'five poverty drivers' – welfare dependency; family breakdown; drug and alcohol addiction; educational failure; and significant personal debt. As McKenzie (ibid. 2015:11) points out, all of this 'squarely puts the problems of society on the individual', just as Blair's exclusion and Thatcher's 'cycles of deprivation' had. Within the framing of 'broken' Britain, she suggests, 'it is personal failure and 'bad behaviour' that has broken Britain'(see also Imogen Tyler 2015). By these logics, austerity was a means of 'fixing' the

country's broken finances and welfare system along with the 'moral crisis' of dependency and delinquency that went with the latter (Dowling and Harvie 2014 in Imogen Tyler 2015:494).

The '2011 England Riots' that broke out in urban areas across the country that summer, only exacerbated this rhetoric. They started in Tottenham, northeast London, in response to the fatal police shooting of Mark Duggan, a young, black man. The riots then spread across the Capital, with buildings torched, windows smashed and shops looted. Between the 6th and 11th August, similar activities occurred in urban centres around the country. While the direct catalyst for the riots was racial inequality, mishandling of the details of Duggan's death, and alleged police brutality, the riots were also framed by many within the left-liberal media and academia as a backlash against the austerity measures put in place after the financial crisis, and the disenfranchisement of many young people – in particular, those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (Power 2011; Harvie and Milburn 2013; King and Waddington 2013). Cameron, on the other hand, insisted that this was another sign of breakdown Britain, and that the riots were 'criminality, pure and simple' (2011b). Having conveyed his sympathies to those who had suffered as a consequence of the riots and praised the emergency services who had been involved, he went on to deliver a 'clear message to those people who are responsible for this wrongdoing and criminality', stating that 'you are not only wrecking the lives of others, you're not only wrecking your own communities – you are potentially wrecking your own life, too.' He then called on everyone to work together to rebuild these communities (ibid.).

The *Breakdown Britain* report became a justificatory force for much of the welfare reform implemented by Iain Duncan-Smith when he was the Conservative Party's Secretary of State for Work and Pensions during David Cameron's leadership (McKenzie 2015:11). It also added to the culture of blaming the poor for their own poverty, while playing down the societal and structural factors that might feed into it.

Speaking to Ed, who I shared a Wednesday afternoon unpacking shift with at Fareshares, he told me that post-financial crisis austerity measures felt like a 'war on the poor' to him. He was concerned about how people suffering from deprivation were portrayed in the media and on TV, the language that was being used to describe poor people, as well as how this was affecting public perceptions and consciousness. As he told me,

> I suppose I've got used to it now, but certainly for a long time I felt a real shock and dismay about the kind of characterisation of working class people… the kind of poverty porn that's on the telly and all that sort of stuff … it's kind of de-humanising to the extent that it's almost kind of softening up the wider public to make it legitimate to do absolutely anything to people really... And it seems to have an effect. People are genuinely influenced by that and genuinely do see a lot of working-class people as sub-human almost, so yeah, you know, I don't think anybody could have anticipated that 20 years ago.

Having worked in advice services since 2009, Ed had seen the consequences of these post-crisis measures first-hand, and the many ways in which they had impacted people's lives, as well as their physical and mental wellbeing. Speaking to Ed and other advice workers during my fieldwork, I heard of instances in which the process of benefit reassessment and withdrawal had driven people to stress-related self-harm or total mental breakdowns. The latter of which I also witnessed with a friend whose successful appeal against reduced incapacity benefits was rapidly followed by a new reassessment process, leading to their mental breakdown.

Ed went on to explain that, even during Thatcherism, the rhetoric around poverty felt different to how it does now as it was still framed as 'something that you could escape out of. Whereas now, it's something to be punished much more.' He told me that 'there's a definite movement towards the deserving poor and the undeserving poor, which has always been around in the background and that's really being pushed a lot now.' This is also reflected in David Cameron's words, which have an obvious moralising tone, suggesting that to be in receipt of benefits is generally 'the wrong thing to do' (Cameron 2011a).

Throughout his tenure, Cameron's government repeatedly 'stereotyped and stigmatised' people on benefits through the descriptive language they choose to use, which referred to 'welfare dependants' who were 'languishing' within the system (Patrick 2017:145), inferring potential weakness of character, passivity and laziness.

As Ed mentioned, these forms of stigmatisation have also been present in the plethora of TV programmes and tabloid newspaper articles that work to highlight the ways in which benefits recipients attempt to cheat the system, or display other forms of anti-social behaviour. These

include the Channel 4 TV documentary series *Benefits Street,* which aired in 2014, and Channel 5's *Undercover Benefits Cheat* (2015). The *Daily Mirror* tabloid has a whole section on its website devoted to coverage of 'benefit cheats' with many stories about people 'scamming' money out of the state and getting caught working, playing sports or taking fancy holidays while they are supposed to be incapacitated (Mirror online n.d.). At the peak of this interest in poverty porn in 2015, another tabloid, *The Sun,* published a feature in the form of a mock award called the 'Welfies' (short for welfare recipients) in 2015, which featured a list of 'the nation's doss idols – the Brits with a talent for playing the benefits system' (The Sun 2015).

All of these contain a moralising undertone, in which benefit recipients are set up as 'other' and in opposition to the 'hard-working majority'. This, then, is seen to legitimise judgement, stigmatisation, stereotyping and the (de)moralisation of benefit recipients (Patrick 2017:6). This also reinforces the misperception that the bulk of what the British welfare state does 'consists of hand-outs to unemployed people, and that its beneficiaries are an unchanging group, separate and distinct from those who pay for it. Neither of these beliefs is true' (Hills 2017:13).

This highlights the ways in which the media is implicated in reinforcing the moral condemnation of 'the poor'. It is, therefore, a significant site for 'the cultural production of class stigma' (Imogen Tyler 2015:505). Tyler (ibid.505-6) suggests that 'under neoliberal conditions the role of mediating agencies in legitimating inequalities is heightened.' As she explains, '[i]n order to 'realize' the social relations required by neoliberalism, namely the acquiescence to a form of financial capitalism which benefits the rich at the expense of the rest, it was imperative that 'collective representations' of the structural causes of inequality were transformed.' As a consequence, 'class inequalities are rescripted to appear a consequence of individual choices, wealth is 'earned' and poverty is 'deserved'.'

The judgement of poorer people's lives and consumption choices is something that also came up during my fieldwork. Having given a talk about the history of food co-ops in Britain at a co-operative-themed conference in the summer of 2016, with a mixed audience of practitioners, academics and anyone else who was interested in the topic, the issue of food poverty came up. I had mentioned this in relation to austerity and the ways in which the rise of food banks

seemed to correlate with the decline in food co-ops. I had also mentioned the fact that there was a possibility that Brexit may further impact on access to food as prices and trade arrangements changed while the availability of migrant agricultural workers could potentially become more limited – issues about which many studying food policy had raised concerns (see for example Lang, Millstone, and Marsden 2017).

During the questions at the end of the talk, a middle-aged, white woman who worked in the co-operative sector had asked my thoughts on the term 'food poverty'. Building on her experience of working with various food aid schemes in recent years, she felt that it detracted from the fact that food poverty was *poverty*, and therefore a symptom of more systematic inequality. After I had responded, a middle-aged, white man at the back of the room who also worked in the co-operative sector, although for a different business, asked: if people were suffering from food poverty, why were they still drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and buying flat-screen TVs? This, again, created the association between poverty and vice, the legitimacy of judging the life choices of the poor and questions about legitimate need and deservingness.

The woman who had asked the previous question jumped in to respond, telling him in no uncertain terms that benefit recipients were no less entitled to decide what they wanted to spend their money on than anyone else. Why should things that others take for granted be considered vices when they are done by the poor? Following a brief back and forth between the two of them, in which neither showed any sign of changing their position, the session then came to an end. I cannot deny that I was a little relieved that I had not been called on to weigh in on their heated argument. On his way out of the room, the man came up to me and said that he had enjoyed the talk, but he felt a little disappointed by how much of it had focused on London (although it was an overview, I had given some examples from St Hilda's East and Fareshares). He also told me that I should not be so negative about Brexit.

Given the co-operative nature of the event, this incident surprised me a little. It made me realise that I had anticipated that the people there would be more likely to have the kind of left-leaning attitudes towards welfare that the woman had. This was due to the long association of the movement with left-wing ideology. Indeed, the Co-operative Party in the UK, which was set up in 1917, has an ongoing electoral pact with the Labour Party whereby

candidates can stand for Labour and the Co-operative Party to avoid standing against each other.[39] As Patrick (2017:5) points out, though, the general direction of welfare and the arguments that justify it seem to have won support amongst many within the general public, exemplifying Ed's fears.

In her study of welfare reform in the UK , Patrick (2017) shows that even amongst the out-of-work benefit recipients she worked with, there seemed to be a consensus that some were deserving of benefits (such as themselves), while others' entitlements were questionable as they were either lazy or working the system. They, therefore, stigmatised others in order to shake off the forms of stigma to which they had been subjected (Patrick 2017:163–166). This highlights the ways in which popular discourses and media representations of class stigma can become 'imbricated within social relations at every scale, including relations of the self (Imogen Tyler 2015:505).

Experiences of austerity

Alaya, one of the general advice workers at St Hilda's, who had been working at the centre for twelve years when I interviewed her in the autumn of 2017, also agreed with Ed that things had changed significantly since the election in 2010,

> I think in the past when Labour was in government, it wasn't as severe; there was a lot more financial help available to clients in the area, and everywhere to be honest. It's ever since the Tories [the Conservative Party] have come back into government, especially with the start of the austerity measures, that people have been seeing a huge impact on their finances. There have been benefit cuts, there has been the benefit cap. There has been the bedroom tax[40]… and all of these have had a huge impact on clients and the amount of money they've got to live on. The benefit cap, I think, has been the biggest impact, because where people have had a certain amount of money to live on, when it was capped down to a certain amount, they found that it was hard to pay their rent, because most of the deductions were made to housing

[39] This has been in place since 1927.

[40] This is an informal name given to a rule implemented in 2012 as part of the Welfare Reform Act, which means that housing benefit payments are reduced if a claimant's property is judged to have more bedrooms than they need.

> benefit, so they had to find the extra income to cover their rent or risk losing their home. We've had to look at charities to help meet the shortfall.

Many of the cuts to social security for working-age adults and families have been seen by academics and left-leaning popular discourses as both disproportionate and potentially punitive (Dowler 2014:161). In particular, the increased application of benefit 'sanctions', which involve unemployment payments being paused or cut if recipients are not seen to be following the rules properly, or showing enough willingness to work, have garnered much attention.

When I asked Alaya what she thought it would take to improve a situation which she described as 'harsh', 'very, very tough' and 'depressing', she suggested,

> I think politicians need to start living here alongside these people and see how the other half live, because it's all very well for them to sit in their posh houses and make these decisions, and say, so many millions and millions of pounds are being wasted or used on people and the welfare system, but the welfare system is there for a reason and these people are genuinely in need. There are many people out there who don't choose to be on benefits, but they have to be on benefits for whatever reason, be it health reasons or personal circumstances… can't go out to work, or for lack of education can't get a decent job… or can't get a job that pays enough to feed the family, so you have to look at everything. It's almost like they think people choose to live like this. Nobody chooses to live like this. I think the politicians need to become a lot more understanding. Personally I think it would have been easier and better if Labour had come into government, but obviously, what can you say? It is what it is really. 'Cause it seemed like Corbyn was a bit more in touch with people compared to Theresa May… but I'm sure even if he had come into power, his fellow colleagues wouldn't have allowed him to do as much as he probably wanted. But, who knows…

Her comments mirrored the anger felt about austerity during the 2017 election campaign, that politicians were not only out of touch, but also judgemental and punitive in their

approach to people who made use of the benefit system.[41] Alaya clearly also saw the welfare system as a universal entitlement, or a right and a necessity.

Although discussions framed in terms of 'austerity' rarely came up at St Hilda's, some of those who interacted with the project were, indeed, feeling the strains of precarious lives and the pressures that welfare reform was putting on their benefit claims and interactions with related statutory services.[42] Various volunteers and customers from the food co-op made use of the advice service that formed a part of the Food and Advice Project, which City Bridge funded in order to deal with some of these concerns. The ability to feed their families or themselves was clearly a worry along with housing and basic financial needs or worries. Many of those who were involved with the project were the recipients of state support in one form or another, ranging from social housing to unemployment benefits or forms of incapacity benefit for those unable to work due to illness or disability.[43]

Here, too, there was a sense of frustration with the state and its welfare representatives. One volunteer told me that she had previously been given a small amount of housing benefit due to her caring responsibilities. She had then been told to give it back as she was not entitled after all, before being offered it again. She decided she would rather manage on her own despite the potential entitlement. She seemed angry at an overly bureaucratic system that was not only disorganised, but had also tried to make her feel as if she had attempted to take more than she should have done. To reject this benefit, then, was a way to maintain her dignity and to have some agency within a structure that felt very top-down, even if it meant going without money that could have made a difference to her and her family's life.

At Fareshares, too, several of its members were dealing with the impacts of welfare reform in one way or another. This challenges the perception of local food projects and alternative food networks as spaces purely for middle-class people with comfortable incomes (Goodman,

[41] This understanding of the benefit system tends to gloss over the fact that all citizens access aspects of state welfare, focussing instead on unemployment benefits (Patrick 2017).

[42] In order to maintain the privacy and dignity of those involved with each food co-op, and to avoid the exoticisation of their experiences, I choose not to go into too much detail of individual cases, instead, illustrating the kinds of austerity and welfare related issues that anecdotally arose in each food co-op unless a research participant specifically chose to discuss something of this nature with me during an interview. Names are often changed or left out in relation to these accounts for the same reason.

[43] Other volunteers, however, did have more stable livelihoods and lifestyles, or more choice in terms of the work that was on offer to them.

DuPuis, and Goodman 2014:14) (a perception I explore further in chapter four). Few of the co-op's members worked in well-paid, full-time jobs, instead some were freelance, others worked part-time in anything from retail jobs to driving for Deliveroo,[44] some were students, and others received various forms of benefits due to physical and mental health issues. As such, while some had comfortable incomes and lifestyles, others were dealing with various forms of precarity, whether through job and lifestyle choices or through circumstance.

While I was at Fareshares, more than one member mentioned how they were dealing with the reassessment of benefits, such as Personal Independence Payments[45], leading to much stress, and the negotiation of complex rules, regulations and bureaucratic processes which require considerable skill, mental and physical capacity and confidence to complete the paperwork, attend assessment meetings or appeal hearings, and fight for one's right to these benefits.

One Fareshares member, Nuala, who had been on benefits for several years due to severe anxiety and depression, told me that her recent interaction with the benefit system felt 'very frightening'. At the time of our interview in 2017, she was still waiting to be reassessed and transitioned from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payments (PIP),[46] but she said that all of the other people she knew from a mental health day centre she visited who had be transitioned were having their benefits cut. She told me that the sense of fear and anticipation this gave her had really affected what she did. Ask she explained,

> I think I was a bit more active a couple of years ago. When I had money to do more, to occasionally go to the cinema. I don't have that anymore. So, even though I've really tightened my belt, I also still manage to have less money because they've cut it so much and because I'm trying to save a bit because I'm so frightened of what they are going to do… Any day now. They've written to me to say that they will call me. And

[44] A take-away delivery service, which has become synonymous with the 'gig' economy in which organisations contract with independent workers on short-term, often flexible contracts or as freelancers.

[45] A form of benefit which helps with some of the additional costs that come with a long-term health condition or disability.

[46] DLA and PIP are welfare benefits intended to help people with long-term health problems or disabilities. PIP was introduced as part of the 2012 Welfare Reform Act to gradually replace DLA. The medical assessments and eligibility for welfare are more regular and more stringent than with DLA. Clearly the name Personal Independence Payment itself has discursive power in relation to individual autonomy and more active forms of citizenship.

> when they call me, I will have four weeks. And then if I don't apply within those four weeks, it could be that they will stop my money instantly. And then if I do apply [for PIP] and get rejected, that'll be eight weeks. So, within eight weeks I could have the bigger amount of my money cut.

She also received Employment Support Allowance, but she said that it was 'a tiny amount'. She explained that her benefits had already been reduced in recent years as her health had improved slightly (which she felt was fair). The fact that the state no longer increased benefits in line with inflation, however, meant that the value of what she did receive had also gone down.

Other researchers have also documented similar stories, highlighting how these experiences of being forced to repeatedly prove deservingness can exacerbate psychological distress. As part of this distress, Patrick (2017:3) argues that these processes of welfare reform not only impact on an individual's 'capacity to live in the present', but also 'to reflect on their past(s) and plan for the future'. The processes of welfare negotiation and the threat of precarity can become all encompassing. In the conversations I had with volunteers at Fareshares and St Hilda's, though, while they demonstrated frustration and anger with a punitive system which was treating them as untrustworthy, they tried hard to hold on to their dignity and sense of autonomy. This was done by either fighting for what they saw as a right or extricating themselves from the stress and stigma the system seemed to be piling onto them by refusing the conditional, and retractable, gift of welfare.

Conclusions

In Alfred Marshall's work *Citizenship and Social Class*, he argues that the poor law of the mid-19th century had a lasting legacy as '[t]he stigma which clung to poor relief expressed the deep feelings of a people who understood that those who accepted relief must cross the road that separated the community of citizens from the outcast company of the destitute' (Marshall 2006:33). Within successive visions of state welfare, this division appears to have persisted, even as the balance of rights and responsibilities has shifted.

Koch notes, 'the state has always drawn distinctions between those it considers to be respectable, and hence deserving citizens, and those who are not' (Koch 2018:34). The story of the Boundary Estate and the slum dwellers who were unable to live there is a stark

reminder of this. This is no less true of the welfare state, which still privileges some citizens over others despite discourses of universality.

However, as Koch suggests (ibid.), 'interpretations of who constitutes a model citizen have changed in accordance with shifts in political economy over time.' If the post-war ideal was a white, male, British 'worker-citizen' 'who had contributed to society through labour and taxes', then with the move 'towards a liberal market economy from the 1970s onwards' this shifted from the 'worker-citizen' to the discerning 'consumer-citizen' (discussed in chapter one), who is capable of self-fashioning and self-care as well as rational choice (ibid. 2018:34).

This acts as a reminder that the welfare state itself 'is very much a time-bound concept' premised on the restriction of free-market operations (Fraser 2002:xxiv), which came out of a long historical process relating to perceptions of morality, political economy and of citizenship. The welfare state was also premised on a Keynesian-Fordist model of economy and labour, which is bound to a specific moment in the history of capitalism, now past. This has given way to more globalised forms of labour and trade, and more precarious subjectivities in relation to work and living conditions (Molé 2010), as I discuss further in chapter five. 'The transition from industrial to financial capitalism in Europe has effected 'deepening inequalities of income, health and life chances within and between countries, on a scale not seen since before the Second World War'' (Hall et al. 2014:9 in Tyler 2015:497). This has led to significant income disparities.

Since 2010 when the UK returned to a Conservative-led government, Koch suggests that 'the contours of citizenship have changed once more, as discourses of hyper-moralization have resurfaced' (ibid. 2018:34), and this, in turn, has created space for a more punitive regime. Patrick (2017:167) argues that within this context, where politicians simultaneously stigmatise those on benefits while also distancing themselves from everyday citizens 'creates multi-tiered processes of exclusion and undermines the scope for claimants to exercise their political citizenship rights.' This can impact on their ability to 'engage with the political system in any effort to challenge or question the status quo.'

These transitions also raise questions about the role of the co-operative within the different phases of political economy and the accompanying regimes of welfare. In its early years the co-operative movement offered working-class people a way 'to build from the bottom, and

not to accept their lot [within the structures of society]... Co-operation offered a richer, more fulfilled social existence, a chance for working people to build a better world' (Gabriel and Lang 2006:157). It also created an alternative form of safety net for its members in opposition to the punitive poor laws of the age, or the hierarchies of charitable provision. Building a scheme around equity and mutuality must have felt powerful within such an environment. It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that they came to feel a little outmoded in the 1950s and '60s (ibid.:158) in an era of greater equity and abundance.

Within the second and third wave, co-operatives have clearly also had a relationship to low-incomes and issues of inequality, and a desire to make food more financially accessible to a broader range of people. This can be seen in the activities of the London food co-ops I mentioned in the introduction, where members joined in response to economic recession, in the case of Catriona and Norman, or used their co-operatives as a means of bypassing profiteering shopkeepers in an era of rising food prices while fostering mutual support as East London Big Flame did. It is also present in the access-based food co-ops of the New Labour years, which conformed to neoliberal discourses of active citizenship and collective self-help, which I discuss further in chapter three.

As for St Hilda's, as its website states (St Hilda's East Community Centre n.d.), the founding members of the settlement community 'would still recognise the aims of St Hilda's East today: to combat deprivation and social exclusion through providing education and recreational provision along with social care – activities that enable and empower individuals'. The food co-op is no exception to these values. At Fareshares, too, Nuala explained to me that it was austerity that had brought her to Fareshares in the first place as the basic items such as grains, pulses and nuts were cheap there. She heard about it from a day centre near to the food co-op (which has now closed down) where various other visitors shopped at Fareshares. She then started volunteering because, in the spirit of the project, she wanted to be able to give something back as well as benefitting from it. As the following chapters show, at both food co-ops the current era of austerity has caused them to reflect on their practices of aid and care, the ways in which these contest and conform to contemporary discourses and subjectivities, as well as living conditions for their members and wider communities.

Chapter three – Volunteerism, austerity and aid

Food and poverty

> ***BBC journalist Andrew Marr:*** *I'm sorry Prime Minister, but we have nurses going to foodbanks at the moment. That must be wrong?*
>
> ***Prime Minister Theresa May:*** *We have, and there are many complex reasons why people go to food banks. And I want to develop an economy where, yes, we have a strong economy so that we can pay for the public services that people will need. But also, we have an economy where we're creating secure jobs and well paid jobs.* (The Andrew Marr Show 2017)

On the 18th April 2017, just nine months into Theresa May's tenure as Prime Minister, she made the decision to call a 'snap' general election to be held on the 8th of June that year. The previous general election, which her predecessor David Cameron had won, had been just two years earlier, meaning that another election was not due until 2020. This surprised many people as just a few months earlier she had emphatically stated that she would not be calling an early election. In her official statement she explained that this was a way to deal with divisions within parliament relating to Brexit. According to May, it was also a means of ensuring a stronger mandate as she proceeded with negotiations with the EU about the terms by which the UK would leave the union (May 2017c). Although the election was framed in relation to Brexit, much of the discussion within the media and amongst the general public, also revolved around austerity and welfare reform. Despite promising an economy that would work 'not for a privileged few, but for every one of us' (May 2016) when she first came to power, people had come to believe that she was not living up to this claim. In particular, the fact that nurses in full-time employment within the National Health Service (NHS) were having to resort to using food banks,[47] led to considerable outrage. When BBC Journalist Andrew Marr confronted her about it on his TV programme, people felt her response about the

[47] In the British context, a food bank is a charitable organisation where people can go to get free food parcels of between three and five day's food for an individual or household. They typically receive tins and dried goods, which the food bank received through charitable donation or through arrangements with supermarkets and food waste charities. Food bank users tend to be referred through front-line services such as GP (doctors') surgeries, advice services and Jobcentres.

'complex reasons' for food bank use was inadequate, with many retorting that the main reason for using food banks was *poverty*.[48] Given the strong emotional connection and sense of pride many British people feel towards the NHS (Ipsos MORI 2014; Street 2016), nurses using food banks was a particularly potent symbol of the ills of austerity.

As the prevalence of food banks suggests, the forms of food aid on offer have also changed within this climate of austerity, as I discuss below. In this chapter I argue that, just as Victorian charity aligned with the liberal values of that period, charitable giving within the context of austerity Britain also conforms to neoliberal forms of governmentality. These include the bolstering of the third sector, and volunteerism as a performance of active or ethical citizenship. Having discussed how the motivations of the volunteers at St Hilda's and Fareshares sit within these logics, I take a closer look at the practices of aid and exchange within each food co-op, the value and values attributed to the goods they sell, the ideal typical models they attempt to work by, and the ways in which these can be complicated by the constraints of the current era.

Around the time of the 2017 election, there were various forms of backlash against the Conservative Party and its austerity agenda. A week before the general election, for example, a song titled 'Liar' by anti-austerity band Captain SKA, which mocked Theresa May's claims of 'strong and stable leadership' was heading to the top of the charts (see Poole 2017 for more in this slogan). This also included the trope of nurses using food banks and the rise in child poverty. All proceeds from the song's sale went to food banks and the People's Assembly's anti-austerity campaign (Weaver 2017).

Around London subversive posters and banners bashing Theresa May or promoting the opposition leader, Jeremy Corbyn, also started to pop up, pasted on to walls, lampposts and any other surface that was flat enough. These included slogans such as 'Theresa May. Liar, liar £995 pants on fire', which used the popular children's rhyme to poke fun at the Prime Minster while reminding people that she owned a pair of leather trousers worth £995. These

[48] In relation to nurses, their financial difficulty was due to low or no increases in wages in recent years, while costs such as housing and transport continued to rise (see for example Nursing the UK 2017; Campbell 2017; Lay 2017).

had caused uproar in the media in late 2016, as they were seen to send the wrong signal to a country that had been dealing with austerity for several years (Sawer 2016).

Figure 16 Subversive posters in East London. Celia Plender, 2017.

In contrast to the Conservative Party's austerity measures, the Labour Party proposed various forms of public spending in their manifesto in areas such as housing and education. They reiterated their commitment to a 'jobs first Brexit' and the protection of British industry during negotiations to leave the EU. Their manifesto also promised the renationalisation of infrastructural facilities including the rail network, postal services and water. A strong movement known as Momentum built up around the party's leader Jeremy Corbyn, in support of his return to classically left-wing issues which sat in opposition to a more liberal model of governance.

Overall, the 2017 election significantly weakened Theresa May and the Conservative Party's position. The Conservatives lost 22 seats while the Labour Party gained 21. As consequence, there was a 'hung parliament' in which no party had a strong majority. Ultimately, this led the Conservative Party to form a 'weak' majority which was legislatively supported by the right-wing and socially conservative Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). A move that greatly concerned many within the centre and on the left.

Alaya, the advice worker at St Hilda's, told me that she had seen more and more people experiencing poverty and having to access food banks or schemes such as the food co-op over the years. As the discourses around poverty and hunger during the 2017 election discussed here highlight, food banks have become a particularly emotive symbol of austerity in the UK as increasing numbers of people are turning to such 'emergency food aid' schemes which cater to people facing significant financial shocks or crises. Benefit sanctions, cuts and changes are some of the most common causes of food bank use in the UK, along with low income and indebtedness (Trussell Trust 2016; Trussell Trust 2018; Lambie-Mumford 2017; Dowler 2014). When I spoke to Simon Shaw who heads the food charity Sustain's food poverty project, Food Power, he agreed that 'welfare reforms are clearly a massive driver for poverty [including food poverty] and destitution'. He also highlighted the added pressures that people faced in cities such as London, 'where housing and cost of living can be more expensive.' Indeed, in a recent survey of food insecurity in London (the first of its kind), one in five adults were found to have low or very low levels of food security, and 60% of these were in work. One in six parents were also said to have children living with food insecurity (Demography and Policy Analysis Team, City Intelligence Unit 2019).

During the New Labour years (1997-2010), there were many attempts to reduce inequalities in health and related diet and nutritional issues as St Hilda's food co-op's work did. Since the financial crisis of 2008, however, both the focus on and the means of tackling food-related inequalities seem to have changed. The Labour Party's food policy work towards the end of their time in power stressed the importance of access to 'a decent environmentally and socially sustainable diet' as 'part of the understanding of poverty in the UK in a similar way to the need for decent housing and affordable heating' (Dowler 2014:163). Dowler (ibid.) suggests that the Coalition Government, in contrast, were less interested in food security[49] on a household level. With the shift to the Coalition Government, there was also a broader move away from policy focussed on the needs of those living on low incomes in areas of multiple deprivation, who were dealing with the consequences of rising food and fuel costs (due to the

[49] United Nations' Committee on World Food Security defines this as 'the condition in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (IFPRI n.d.). While this term is commonly used in policy discussions, the term 'food poverty' is often used in media coverage and discussions amongst the general public. Both are often used interchangeably in academic literature (Lambie-Mumford 2017:17).

2007-8 food and financial crises) along with declining employment, stagnant wages and cuts to benefit provisions. Instead, there was an expectation that people would develop individualised coping strategies and informed consumer choices reminiscent of Thatcher's ethos of an 'enterprise culture' as opposed to the 'nannying' welfare state discussed in chapter one, or the 19th century liberal promotion of self-help and charitable giving as discussed in chapter two.[50] This is something that Claire Pritchard, the CEO of Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency, which used to run various food co-ops picked up on when I spoke to her in 2015. We met in her office in Greenwich on the day that the 2015 election results were announced, and the meeting started with our joint commiseration about the Conservative Party's victory. As well as discussing the work the development agency did, we also talked about the transition from New Labour to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition. When I asked her what impact this had had on community food schemes, she told me,

> The increase in food poverty and the fact that you have the Trussell Trust with their lovely 1890s model of benevolence, that's what you're seeing… there's a government saying, 'well, charities and benevolence will pick it up.'… The rise in that whole benevolence model is not the answer… It's based on believing in inequality.

Once again, this focus on individual choice, passed not only responsibility but also culpability onto those unable to manage their expenditure on food and other basic necessities (Dowler 2014:164–5), while shifting discourses away from themes of equity, rights or entitlements to others around personal responsibility and moral judgements about 'deservingness', which are a classic component of charitable giving just as much as they are state welfare (Cloke, May, and Johnsen 2010:105).

The number of emergency food aid schemes has grown exponentially since 2010. From April 2016 to March 2017, for example, the largest food bank organisation in the UK, the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network, provided 1,182,000 parcels containing three days of emergency food to adults and children in the UK (Trussell Trust 2017). This was up from 61,468 in 2010-

[50] This also echoes one of the fundamental debates on the role of the individual, the state and the market that have been ongoing since mercantilism gave way to capitalism. These are evident in Adam Smith's work on the free market as well as that of early political economist and utilitarian philosophers, all of whom contributed to the political philosophy of liberal governmentality in Britain (Fraser 2002:109–12).

11 (Trussell Trust 2012). While the number of food banks and other emergency food schemes has gone up considerably in this period, so too has the number of people turning to them. Food surplus charities, such as FareShare,[51] have also grown considerably. This now facilitates food provision for over 9.5 thousand different community groups (FareShare n.d.). The 'third' or charitable sector, rather than the state, is responsible for much of the work that goes on in relation to emergency food aid.

Figure 17 Subversive street art, Shoreditch East London. Celia Plender, 2017.

As for the government, it has regularly denied any connection between changes in the social security system and increased use of food banks (Dowler 2014:169). Instead it has suggested that supply creates demand, and as Dowler (2014:160) notes, the practice of charitable food

[51] Incidentally, Martin Oddsocks told me that one of the founders of FareShare used to volunteer at Fareshares, and that is where they got the name from. According to Martin, FareShare even used a similar font and design to Fareshares when it first started. When I asked him what he thought about all this, he did not seem too bothered, suggesting that the name might be more appropriate to a food sharing scheme such as theirs anyway.

provision has simultaneously not only come to be 'recognized by the state at national and local levels' these days, but also 'endorsed, enshrined and encouraged'.[52]

This all fits in with the ongoing neoliberalisation of 'welfare' provision in which the third sector does much of the work. As a consequence, food assistance projects 'risk becoming part of the welfare state, and actually enabling its further withdrawal' however much they do not intend to (Lambie-Mumford 2017:129).

The rise of volunteerism

Many scholars have bemoaned the loss of a perceived 'Golden Age' of 20th century welfare in which there was rising employment and wages, with greater social benefits and collective justice. The free-market oriented form of economy that has developed in its place is said to lack a conscience and be tied up with more competitive and calculative practices (see for example Harvey 2007; Bauman 2000; see also Muehlebach 2012:6). Muehlebach (2012:24–6), however, suggests that morality has not, in fact, been lost. Just as it was a fundamental aspect of a liberal market (as seen through Victorian volunteerism in chapter two), it also works in 'productive tension' with a neoliberal market order. One of the ways in which this becomes evident is through the role that the third sector and its volunteers have come to play in acts of aid and care previously performed by the state.

Volunteering itself has a long history in the UK, as the middle-class Victorian propensity to charitable work attests.[53] As Kendall wrote in 2003,

> Not since the late nineteenth century, when voluntary action was integral to contemporary concepts of citizenship, and the associated institutional infrastructure of charities and mutuals were the cause of considerable national pride, have organizations occupying the space between the market and the state commanded so much attention.

These days, the UK 'has one of the highest rates of volunteering in the world' according to Nick Ockenden from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), a membership

[52] At the start of 2019, however, the work and pensions secretary, Amber Rudd, acknowledged that there was a connection between the roll out of Universal Credit (a catch all benefit which is replacing others such as housing benefit, income support and child tax credits) and the rise in food bank use in the UK (BBC 2019a).

[53] In fact, volunteering can be traced back to at least the Middle Ages when there was a strong connection between religion and alms for the poor (Brindle 2015).

organisation which promotes and facilitates volunteering and also represents the voluntary sector to the government (Brindle 2015). The website for Volunteers' Week, an initiative first set up in 1984 which NCVO now runs, states that '20.1 million (38%) people in the UK volunteered formally at least once a year and 11.8 million (22%) of people did so at least once a month' in 2017/18. Amongst this group, 'wanting to do good' by 'improving things and helping others' was the most common motivation for volunteering (National Council for Voluntary Organisations 2018).

This rise in volunteerism is also reflective of increased state interest in the role of volunteerism in the social construction of citizens who take responsibility for themselves and their communities as state services retract (Holmes 2009:265). While the Conservative government under Thatcher and Major used and promoted the concept of the 'active citizen', New Labour took this one step further proposing the idea of the 'active community' in which, in Jack Straw's words,

> The commitment of the individual is backed by the duty of all organisations – in the public sector, the private sector and the voluntary sector – to work towards a community of mutual care and balance of rights and responsibilities. (Straw, 1998 in Rose 2000:1405)

This 'reinvention' of community was proposed as a necessary alternative to the individualism which was seen to have become prevalent in society in the late 20th century.

Just as Straw highlighted the necessity for all citizens to take collective responsibility for themselves and their society in order to be deserving of inclusion in it, Tony Blair also wrote about the necessity for citizens 'to give as much as what they take' in order to build 'successful communities' (Blair, 1996 in Rose 2000:1404). Volunteering was a key aspect of this giving. Indeed, as Jack Straw stated, voluntary activity was 'the essential act of citizenship' (ibid. Rose 2000:1404).

This focus on community also responded to an acknowledgement of diversity within society when it came to 'culture, values, and mores' and the need to build collectivity while acknowledging difference and enabling 'equal recognition in a single constitutional form' (Rose 2000:1401). Given New Labour's celebration of a multicultural society, and the ways in

which the party attempted to benefit from migrant labour, finding a means of creating cohesion, equality and citizen responsibility must have felt all the more pressing in that period.

Successive political regimes have also maintained an interest in the voluntary sector, as evidenced in David Cameron's Conservative Party's 'Big Society', which proposed 'a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, social action' (Cameron 2010 in Espiet-Kilty 2018), and more recently, Theresa May's 'shared society'. This was proposed in response to Brexit and the forms of social division, inequality and resentment that the referendum highlighted. In a similar vein to her first speech as Prime Minister, her comments on the shared society alluded to those who were just about managing, and the ways in which she hoped to make Britain work 'for everyone and not just the privileged few'[54] by offering more state support to them (May 2017a).

Within her vision of the shared society, she also highlighted the role that third sector organisations, such as charities, campaign groups and social enterprises, would play (May 2017b). As with the active citizens of Thatcherism, active communities of New Labour, or Cameron's vision of Big Society, there is an emphasis within the conception of the 'shared society' on the duties and responsibilities of citizens, rather than their rights, or the government's obligations to them (Espiet-Kilty 2018). Nonetheless, there has been considerably less media coverage or political analysis of the shared society than the Big Society as so much of May's tenure has been taken up with EU withdrawal planning and negotiations.

Under austerity, when awareness of shrinking resources is heightened, more people have felt compelled to take responsibility for their local communities in order to maintain services previously run and paid for by the local authority. These activities have ranged from litter picking to staffing libraries that would otherwise be shut down (Brindle 2015). Others have felt compelled to act out of a humanitarian desire to support people who have been most acutely affected by austerity and welfare withdrawal, such as the elderly, the sick, the disabled, those who find themselves homeless or in need of emergency food.

[54] Interestingly, this phrase is very similar to the title of the Labour Party's 2017 election manifesto and slogan *For the Many Not the Few* (The Labour Party 2017).

Through the processes of responsibilisation, many have argued, these volunteers are crafted into ethical, or moral citizens due to this 'orientation towards the common good' (Rozakou 2016; Muehlebach 2012; Ogawa 2010; Hyatt 2002; Paley 2001). Where the state's parameters have changed in terms of how it assesses the legitimacy of need and suffering in terms of the provision of aid (as demonstrated through welfare reform), these citizens fill in the spaces, motivated by compassion and moral conviction (Ticktin 2011; Muehlebach 2012).

Where other humanitarian issues can feel daunting in size and complexity, those which operate in a 'humanly graspable scale' (Malkki 2015:9), such as food aid, can feel all the more compelling. Hunger in western contexts is an issue that people feel they can actually *do* something about by simply giving food or time (Poppendieck 1998). And while many of those who give may come from the middle classes (a group that Rozakou (2016) and Muehlebach (2012) identify as a common focus of this form of responsibilisation), others start to donate or volunteer in order to give something back, having previously been recipients of such schemes.

Much as the community food access schemes of the New Labour era were criticised as sticking plaster solutions as I mentioned in chapter one (Dowler and Caraher 2003), food banks are considered even more so (Lambie-Mumford 2017). Ticktin (2011:19–20) argues that such charitable or humanitarian acts, which are performed to relieve the suffering of those in need (in this case the hungry), can end up filling in for more politically driven forms of action that fight for rights or attempt to foment positive structural changes. In doing so, these forms of compassionate activity become a means of 'doing politics' despite the lack of a political mandate or set agenda. As a consequence, she argues, such acts can end up reinforcing inequalities, however inadvertently.

Volunteering at Fareshares and St Hilda's

People chose to volunteer at Fareshares and St Hilda's for many different reasons, and they were often aware of what they were getting from the experience as much as what they were giving. Each had their own needs, vulnerabilities and desires, which could be channelled into the act of volunteering (Malkki 2015:4), a mix of self-interest and altruism that is not uncommon within this kind of unwaged work (Baines and Hardill 2008:311; Hayakawa 2014; Malkki 2015).

Although the balance of volunteer priorities and concerns may have changed over time at Fareshares, in relation to its politics (as I discussed in chapter one) for most members of the collective, food was a core aspect of their motivation. They could access more affordable foods, while also promoting certain forms of consumption perceived to be more ethical and environmentally sustainable. Here again, therefore, was a notion of doing something good, while also engaging in forms of everyday politics. The food is 'good' – both in terms of quality, healthfulness and ethical credentials (Miller 2001:123), and the act of making this more available to the local community is good too. And, if this encourages others to shop in more ethically engaged ways which care for fellow humans and the environment, even better. As this highlights, giving time, skills and imagination through the act of volunteering can have social, affective and ethical effects for both selves and others (Malkki 2015:122).

Kopytoff suggests that the biography of objects goes beyond their lifespan as commodities. They are not only materially produced as things, but also 'culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing' (Kopytoff 1988:75). In the case of 'ethically' produced objects, their cultural and moral content is all the more important. Objects 'are not morally neutral', and as de Neve et al. (2008:10) argue, their 'spirit' may retain the invisible residue of their makers. As such, through the act of sourcing and purchasing fairly traded and other ethical goods, Fareshares' members were not only imagining and expressing solidarity with the producers of the goods they stocked, but also materially connecting with them (Malkki 2015:108). Here, we see consumer's ethical actions directed at (often distant) unknown others perceived as being in need – a common aspect of humanitarian discourses and practices in the Global North (Malkki 2015:7). This is also reflected in the decision of the founders of Fareshares to avoid 'cash crops' in solidarity with the 'third world' countries adversely impacted by the unequal terms of global trade.

In many ways, food co-ops are an interface between the materiality of the goods they sell, the meanings that circulate around these items, and the telling of stories about real and desired economic relations, as well as material and social worlds. They shed light on how certain 'people relate to each other through the medium of things, the cultural ideas they bring to bear on that relationship, and the social processes and politics that surround it' (De Neve, Pratt, and Luetchford 2008:5). Performing acts of ethical consumption, therefore, speaks to political economic structures in which citizens are accepting a role in the regulation

of the market, rather than assuming or expecting that the state will take an interventionist stance. This has also been critiqued by some academics as another example of responsibilisation (Guthman 2008a).

For many Fareshares members, vegetarianism and veganism were also means of caring through food. (The majority of members I spoke to were vegetarian, while a handful were vegan.)[55] This care often combined aspects of care for animals, selves and other people or for the environment. These, then, are activities that attempt to 'maintain, continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible' (Fisher and Tronto 1990 in Kneafsey et al. 2008:42; see also Puig de la Bellacasa 2017 on caring for the environment).

At St Hilda's the relationship to ethical consumption was less all-encompassing. While some customers would come purely for the organic and fairly-traded goods, others would avoid them, seeing them as over-priced. Many volunteers mixed and matched, feeling that their budgets would not stretch to only organics, but were still keen to add some into their and their families' diets. This was often valued on the basis of the perceived health benefits of organic.

When we went on a volunteer visit to the organic farmer, who produced the goods on sale at St Hilda's, many of the volunteers commented on how much time, care and effort were put into production at Sarah Green Organics. As Zina put it, the produce was 'grown with love'. The following week, as we sat and drank tea at the end of the morning shift, a couple of the volunteers were still thinking about the visit. One of the volunteers, Vanessa, mentioned that she had seen a programme which highlighted the impact of supermarket ordering systems on farmers if orders are changed at the last minute and income and stock are lost. Another one of the volunteers, Toyin, suggested that the government should be held more accountable for these things, for allowing the system to become this way and not intervening sufficiently. Vanessa agreed.

Many of the volunteers at both food co-ops were also keen to contribute something to the local community, to support people perceived to be less privileged than themselves, or, at St

[55] This is often something that came up quickly in conversations with the various people I worked with at the food co-op, and could feel a little as if one was being ethically sized-up. This was a test I failed as I am not currently a vegetarian despite eating a low-meat diet. I often felt compelled to share this piece of information with people along with the fact that I used to be a vegetarian.

Hilda's, to support the older people who shopped at the food co-op. In interviews that I conducted for the newsletter, helping the older people often came up as one of the aspects of the project that people enjoyed, and which, no doubt, made them feel that they were doing something tangibly useful and beneficial to others. By helping the older people with their shopping, we were giving them access and enabling them to choose what they wanted to buy and eat, while benefitting from the sensorial experience of assessing the produce and picking the items they liked the look of. This was also a bonding experience for both the volunteers and the older people. Despite the project's focus on access to affordable food and food poverty, I never heard any of the volunteers focus on this aspect of its work.

Volunteering could also be a means of keeping busy, building structure into one's week, feeling useful and more visible (Muehlebach 2012; Malkki 2015). When Lourdes from St Hilda's talked about taking on Arpan, who has learning differences, for example, she told me, 'He says to other people 'I'm going to work' on a Thursday morning 'I'm going to my work at St Hilda's.' So, it was a real sense of pride for him and he was given certain jobs and it was really interesting.' Arpan continued to be an integral part of the food co-op team, while I was there, building connections with many other volunteers as we all learned to work together and understand each other's varying backgrounds, boundaries, interests and support needs. And he still took pride in his work with the food co-op. As he told me during a volunteer interview for the newsletter, he felt 'so happy' when he came to the food co-op, and that he enjoyed helping the customers.

At Fareshares, too, some of the volunteers who were not working due to physical and mental health issues acknowledged that they found the routine that volunteering with the collective gave to their week was something they valued. It meant that they knew for at least one day of the week, people would be expecting them and notice if they did not show up, and this felt reassuring. To create a greater sense of purpose, structure and belonging for themselves, these volunteers engaged in activities which involved routine and social contact. In doing so, they not only attended to the needs of the project or the others involved, but also to themselves, enacting forms of 'care of the self' (Foucault 1988; Malkki 2015:10).

Food poverty and food surplus

As discussed in chapter one, food co-ops such as St Hilda's are more reflective of New Labour's strategy in relation to food insecurity, than they are the Conservative Government's. As a consequence, in the period that food banks have risen in number, food co-ops have declined. This also correlates with the conclusion of various funding schemes for local food projects such as the Big Lottery-funded programme Making Local Food Work, which ran from 2007-11 and included a food co-op strand (Sustain n.d.), and others such as Local Food, which St Hilda's Food Co-op received funding from (National Lottery Good Causes 2011).

Following the rise in the number of people using emergency food aid schemes, and the number of schemes themselves following the financial crisis, an All-Party Parliamentary Group was launched in 2013 to explicitly look into hunger and food bank use in the UK (Field n.d.). Reflecting the common discomfort that can be felt in 'high-income countries about the fact that there are simultaneous issues of hunger and over production and consumption leading to food waste (Caraher and Furey 2017; see also Poppendieck 1999), many of the group's recommendations linked the two issues by encouraging the redistribution of food surplus to address food insecurity (Caraher and Furey 2017:8).

Within my own fieldwork, many people seemed to be very aware of the issue of food waste, which was gaining much media coverage at the time. This coverage ranged from TV programmes by celebrity chefs such as Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall to local news campaigns such as the free newspaper the *Evening Standard's* food waste campaign, with which the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, also became involved (Cohen 2016). When I asked food co-op participants what they were most concerned about in relation to food these days, food waste often came up. The surplus foods on offer at St Hilda's also elicited similar responses from the customers, who often felt angry that such an issue existed at all (especially in an affluent country such as the UK, therefore echoing Caraher and Furey's comments above). Whether it was morally acceptable to feed other people's waste to the poor was also questioned. The coordinator of another food-access based social enterprise fruit and veg stall in East London was particularly indignant about the fact that this was becoming such a common practice in food poverty alleviation strategies.

At these times, questions of responsibility often arose – who should be responsible for limiting food waste, or ensuring that citizens have enough food. The state was usually seen as the primary agent, which should be looking at how to legislate against such issues. This is also reflected in the literature where various authors have questioned such actions, framing them in relation to rights-based discourses, which suggest that the use of food surplus in this way 'does not meet the needs or rights of citizens' (Caraher and Furey 2017:6; see also Kenny and Sage 2018) or deal with the broader structural issues in relation to food poverty or food surplus (Dowler 2014; Poppendieck 1999).

While access to affordable food has always been a part of St Hilda's Food Co-op's motivation, its most recent funding from City Bridge Trust engages very specifically with food poverty. When I asked Jenny how she thought the project dealt with the issue she told me,

> I think what the food co-op does to address food poverty is around prices, basically trying to keep prices as low as we can, making sure that people know we are here. The people who are most likely to benefit from lower prices… if we were in a different location, if we were closer to Whitechapel High Street where there is a vast array of market traders selling very good fruit and veg I don't think we would have the same need for a co-op as we do here. But with a lot of those market traders what worries me is that there are threats to their future because of the way that gentrification and corporatisation are going, so I think it's a lot to do with location here, that there isn't anything that close for people so it's very, very local. It's about people [who are] very, very local. And I think the other way we address food poverty is through the volunteers. Through volunteers getting closer to getting paid work.

She went on to discuss the fact that the community centre has a £3.60 allowance that volunteers could claim for lunch, and how food co-op volunteers are given the option to use their lunch allowance to buy fruit and veg from the stall if they want to. As she explained,

> A lot of people... a lot of parents with families at home, would rather do that [use the money to buy vegetables rather than lunch], so I think that's something that's, it's not massive but it's something that will hopefully help. But what is big is the skill set that people are acquiring in terms of... because that's in them for wherever they go and whatever they choose to go on to use it for. It's not always that they get as much

> choice as they should get [in terms of jobs] but... yeah, so I think that's the main area. Yeah, I mean food… it's kind of universal isn't it? So, it's kind of… if someone is struggling, then that is part of what they are going to be struggling with is buying food.

It is important to acknowledge that this £3.60 allowance was not in any way seen as a form of remuneration for the volunteers, which would have breached minimum wage laws. Instead, it was a means of ensuring that food co-op volunteers, who usually only worked a morning or an evening shift, got the same benefits as others who worked over lunchtime. As a consequence, this was framed as an inclusive act – the allowance was an equal entitlement rather than charity.

When I asked Alaya, the Thursday morning advice worker whether food often came up in her sessions, she told me that,

> …it's there, in the forefront of everyone's mind, but it's not something that's mentioned specifically because when they come to us for advice, it's more the threat of losing their home that they are worried about. They do think about how they're going to support their family, how they're going to feed their family, but most people think, 'what if the council take my home, I won't have a roof over our head. How will I manage that?' So, it's more to do with housing and then the debts they fall into that people come to us for help with and obviously getting their benefits put in place.

There is an urgency to housing issues, utility bills and debts as housing can be lost, utilities cut off and property seized, whereas food can often be reduced, substituted for cheaper options or, in some cases, gone without for short periods in order to make savings without such visible or dramatic short term impacts (Caraher and Dowler 2014). Nonetheless, food poverty is a very real issue, and as many have noted the experience of receiving this form of aid can be both stigmatising and moralising however much it is needed (Lambie-Mumford 2017).

While I was interviewing one member of Fareshares, it came up that she had needed to use a food bank. This was something that she clearly still felt raw about, causing both her posture and her facial expression to change as she spoke. Although she felt terrible for saying it, she told me she hated the food she got from the food bank as much as she hated the experience of having to be there at all. Food meant a lot to her, and she found it tough to be denied any

choice about what she could eat, and to be limited to highly processed tins and dried goods. As a vegan the food bank was unable to fully cater to her dietary requirements (she was given a vegetarian parcel, but there were some dairy products in it), so she found herself having to give some of the goods she was given away, which made her feel even more guilty as she was certainly grateful to be receiving food. (This highlights the social complexities surrounding items given as gifts, and the difficulty that both refusal and acceptance of unwanted items can create (Caplan 2017; Mauss 2002)). She told me,

> …there's this real feeling that if that's your entire diet, if that's all you eat or most of what you eat what happens in your mind is 'oh, this is what I deserve, this is all I deserve,' so again, it's that link between poverty and rubbish food. It's huge, I think if we eat something it becomes part of us physically but also psychologically. It becomes part of our identity… that this is what we eat.

Luckily, she only had to visit the food bank once.

Just as the language used to describe recipients of welfare benefits can impact on their sense of identity or self-worth (Patrick 2017:145), my interlocutors words also allude to the potentially damaging impacts of feeding 'rubbish' food to people suffering from financial issues, and the ways in which they, too, can start to feel like they are 'rubbish'. Feeding food surplus to people in need also creates other uncomfortable connections around concepts of deserving and the moral judgement of 'the poor'. This, therefore, once again imprints such actions, which are framed in terms of care and compassion, with hierarchical and, perhaps, moralising tones.

In the following sections, I look more closely at each food co-op's relationship to issues of food aid and food waste, and the ways in which this interacts with other aspects of their ideologies.

Models of mutual aid

One Saturday afternoon, an East African man came into Fareshares at a quiet moment when no one was in the shop. He explained to Alison and me (both white European),[56] who were

[56] I choose to give details of the homeless man and mine and Alison's identity here to signify the potential cultural as well as ethnic and racial difference. As the subjects of humanitarian aid are often imagined as people of colour in distant countries by aid givers in the Global North (Malkki 2015:7), arguably this adds a resonance and

working the shift, that he was 'a little bit homeless at the moment' and asked if we could give him any crisps or other food. Alison explained that it was a volunteer-run project and a co-operative, so we could not offer him anything on behalf of the collective. We did not have the authority. Neither of us had any cash on us, so, unfortunately, we could not buy him anything with our own money either. After he had said 'ok' and left the shop, Alison looked troubled. She was clearly torn between her personal humanitarian desire to help him, and the responsibility of being a collective member to do right by the food co-op. Not only did she feel that we could not make the decision to give away food on behalf of the collective, as it worked by consensus, she was also worried about the impact it could have on Fareshares' finances if it became known as a place that gave donations.

'He looked very tired' she said, 'I think he must have been homeless for a while'. Shortly afterwards, she went into the back of the building and returned with a 'skip key' for unlocking supermarket bins. She went out onto the street to find him and give him the key. Apparently, he did not want it when she offered though. She speculated that he might not be that desperate after all, suggesting that it would have felt like an amazing gift to her if she had been offered a skip key when she had just started sourcing food from bins. He may not have felt comfortable with the idea of eating food from bins, though, we both acknowledged.

Alison explained that when she first arrived in London, she had gone 'skipping' a lot. She was struggling to make ends meet, and it helped her to get by. A friend had shown her how. They often visited supermarket bins. 'You'd get really good stuff in there', she told me, including whole packs of croissants still in date. 'All just thrown away'. She worked with a crew which made the whole thing feel easier and safer. They also went to markets sometimes. At Borough Market, she recalled, they would each focus on different foods, visiting the traders and the bins to see what was being thrown out. Some traders would be waiting for them as it saved them from having to pack everything up or throw it away. Others were less happy to hand over their produce for free. But the crew would always come back with rich pickings. After some time, Alison's working situation improved and so did her income, which meant she did not need the free food as much as she had. As a consequence, when her crew started to

potential power dynamic to the situation. I am unsure exactly which country the man was from. Having worked with people from Somalia and Ethiopia before though, I made this assumption based on his accent.

disband, she did not do too much to try to find a new one, or choose to go skipping on her own.

The rest of the shift that Saturday was reasonably quiet. We only served about six customers and took around £180, which included a large pre-order of organic flour and yeast for a new customer who was getting into making his own bread. While the fruit and veg that needed to had sold out by that point, we still had two loaves of bread left over at the end of the day. We would usually give these away to others in the building, or take them home as the food co-op would not be open again until Thursday. On this occasion, we both acknowledged that we should have suggested that the homeless man came back at closing time. Alison looked around the street for him again, but could not find him, so we agreed that we would each take a loaf home unless we saw him again after we had left the shop. Just a few doors down as we walked towards the Electric Elephant Café for our monthly meeting, the man said 'hello' to us from one of the Pullens' building's doorways, so we offered him our bread. He seemed happy enough to accept. Alison finally looked satisfied that we had been able to do something to help him without compromising the co-op, its finances or its ideology. As we sat in the café eating a falafel sandwich each before the other food co-op members arrived for the meeting, she acknowledged that it had not been a busy shift, but she felt that we had achieved something that day by being able to offer the homeless man some bread.

Issues of surplus food and charitable giving are always loaded with moral dilemmas and power discrepancies, as discussed above. If a gift should never be refused (Caplan 2017:17; see also Mauss 2002), then this goes some way to explain Alison's surprise at the skip key's refusal. Clearly, eating what others throw away has many different social and cultural connotations, depending on the context. Skip diving was both a lifestyle choice and practicality for Alison, which sat comfortably within her ideology as an activist, a vegan and a leftist (see Clark for more about the social value of skipping and left-wing ideology 2004). For a homeless person, eating other people's rubbish could have very different associations, though, ranging from concerns for safety and legality to feelings of otherness, abjection and desperation.

Along with issues of personal and organisational ideologies and issues of reciprocity, the story also raises questions about notions of aid within the co-operative model and within Fareshares itself. Since the Rochdale Pioneers first came together in 1844 to found a

consumer co-operative, the concepts of self-help and mutual aid have been at the heart of the co-operative movement and its response to issues of poverty and access to affordable and safe food. By pooling their time, resources and efforts, the Pioneers were able to buy food in bulk for the mutual benefit of all the co-op's members, therefore helping themselves and each other. Within this ideology, everyone was perceived as being in need of help, but also able to give it. The interaction between liberal notions of self-help with collectivist ideals of mutual aid therefore configuring the relationship and power dynamics between aid givers and receivers very differently to the more common philanthropic and humanitarian practices of the time (Koven 2004; Scheuer 2011), which typically reinforced the hierarchy between givers and receivers (Kropotkin 2014:179). In Kropotkin's words, this simultaneous role of giving and receiving was a means of bringing 'the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own' (Kropotkin 2014:8).

Like the Rochdale Pioneers, Fareshares' form of co-operation contained elements of self-help and mutual aid, albeit differently configured to the Pioneers in some ways. When they were set up in the 1980s, organic, fairly-traded and vegan goods were not easily accessible and often prohibitively expensive. Fareshares fed the food needs and the ideologies of the local activist and squatter community that it was a part of, many of whom were on low incomes, by providing more affordable, 'ethical' goods. As well as being a resource for this group of like-minded people, there was a desire from the very beginning for the project to be a resource for the wider neighbourhood too. As a consequence, the food co-op did not have the kind of membership model typical of consumer co-operatives. Anyone could volunteer or shop there, and by volunteering you became a member of the collective.[57]

Despite the lack of a formal membership policy, the people who shopped at Fareshares were seen as co-operators within the project in some ways and they were expected to play their part; not least by paying for the goods they wanted. They were also expected to bag their own goods and clean up if they spilled the bulk grains and pulses they weighed out. This system served various ideological functions, creating a different sense of connection and solidarity between those selling and buying the food co-op's stock; stock which should be seen as a mutual resource, just as the space itself was. Shoppers were also responsible for

[57] As a consequence, I use the terms 'volunteer', 'volunteer-member' and 'member' interchangeably in this thesis.

adding up the price of their own goods, before telling the volunteer-member on shift how much it came to. There was no need to show the items to the person behind the counter, and for many years there were very few checks to see if people were paying the correct amount. After all, this was one of the symbols that shoppers and volunteers were all in it together.

The shoppers' participation in these transactions challenged the normative relationship between sellers and buyers, along with the conventional capitalist roles that each performed. All these practices were part of Fareshares' performativity as an anti-capitalist space. They were intended to create a less consumerist exchange, while also building trust and a sense of mutuality between the two parties. More recently, though, after a period of particularly bad financial difficulty, 'chits' were introduced for customers to write a list of their items so that there was some form of record for each purchase. These sit on the food co-op's counter along with pens and calculators so that shoppers are able to add up their list of items more efficiently. While some volunteers have started to double check these numbers in order to avoid under and over payments caused by human error, others still work on trust, accepting the figures presented to them by each shopper.

Paper signs and handwritten whiteboard messages around the food co-op also encouraged shoppers to volunteer, highlighting which shifts were currently in need of help. Others, asked for stationary, participation in other food co-op activities such as cleaning days or doing odd jobs like fixing shelves or door hinges. If shoppers could not offer time to volunteer on a regular basis, then offering these other resources was a way of acknowledging their own sense of responsibility to the project, a desire for it to keep running and a willingness to contribute resources to it, along with an appreciation for the volunteers who did show up every week to keep the doors open. One final means of contributing was through donations. On the counter, there was a pot for people to leave their spare change, which helped with the co-op's running costs, along with a reminder that this was a volunteer-run, non-profit project. While I was at Fareshares, there could be as much as £20 in the donations jar at the

end of the day, or as little as a few pennies.

Figure 18 Cleaning day poster at Fareshares (left), and tidy up sign (right). Celia Plender, 2017, 2015.

Being open to all raised questions about who benefitted from Fareshares' model of mutuality and who got left out. Or to return to Kropotkin's words, whose 'rights' were considered and whose were not. As O'Neill points out, mutuality depends on a 'rough equality of vulnerabilities' (2018:112), and through its acknowledgement and the mutual support that it engenders, this form of vulnerability has the scope to be resistive (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016:1) and performative as a different form of social organisation and model of responsibility, aid and community. When the needs of some become significantly greater than others, though, this shatters the illusion of equal needs as it did when the homeless man came into Fareshares. A compulsion to be charitable also disrupts the model by introducing another vision of charitable aid, in which 'the refusal of requital puts the act of giving outside of any mutual ties' (Muehlebach 2012:viii). This is fundamentally at odds with an ideal typical model of mutual aid. As a consequence, these unequal charitable relationships can slip back into forms of paternalism in which one's own vulnerability is forgotten and replaced instead with perceptions of vulnerability as weakness or passivity which requires more hierarchical forms of support rather than solidarity (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016).

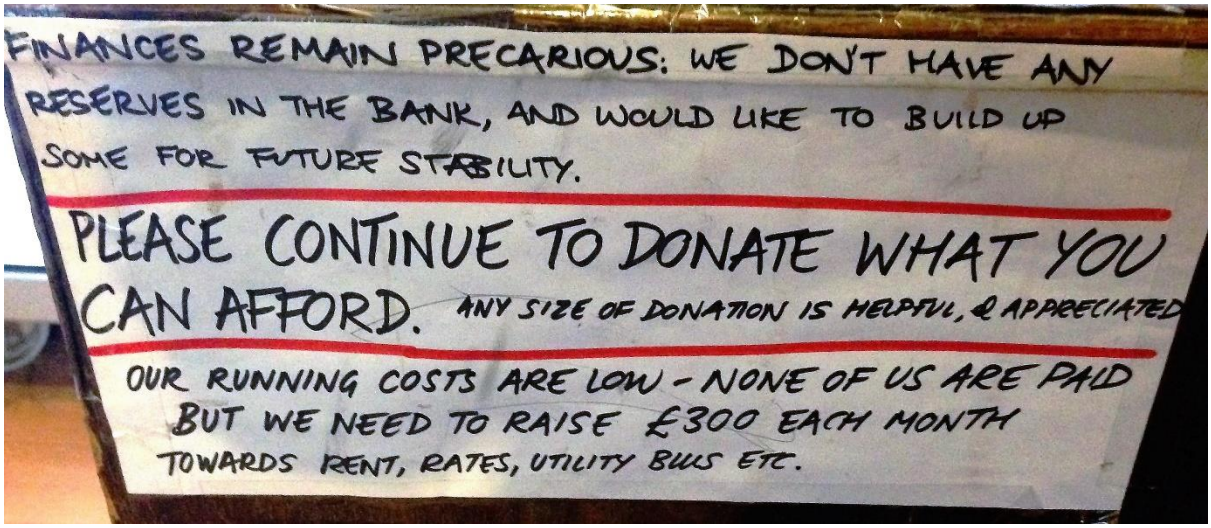


Figure 19 Note on the counter at Fareshares encouraging donations. Celia Plender, 2015.

Tensions around inequality and charitable giving had been a part of the project from the very beginning as Martin, one of the founder members of Fareshares, recalled,

> I guess it was always one of the regrets and awkwardnesses of running a strictly non-profit organisation… you couldn't give things away. You couldn't say that things were free because it was going along with the idea that it's not yours in the first place and you're just paying cost price for what they want. You've got no way of saying 'oh have this for nothing because I know you are in a difficult position.' You could do that personally. You could buy something for someone, which I did, but there wasn't a mechanism for collectively authorising people to take what they needed when they couldn't afford it, which I didn't like… You could give everything away, but you could only do that once because it's effectively the same money coming back week after week, that you were buying the next lot with, and that's the beauty of it, but it only works if it does come back. Yeah, it would be an inherently good thing to do and a grand gesture, but you can only do it once if you give the whole stock away.

Martin's comments reinforce the ideological belief that the co-op and its goods were a form of commons, belonging to everyone involved, but also no-one. This non-alignment with the dominant capitalist narratives about the value of food formed part of Fareshares' performative work by creating spaces for alternative practices and ideals (Vivero Pol et al. 2019:2; see also Wright 2010). Giving goods away on behalf of the collective would also mean that the food co-op's members were claiming ownership of the goods in question in order to

donate them, unless they took the time to seek out consent from all those involved before completing the action. Martin went on to suggest,

> It's the back side of the coin of not being able to turn people away or restrict what they buy because you have a strong suspicion that they're really well-heeled, in the same way that you can't really let people who you have a strong suspicion are having a relatively hard time of it economically take things for nothing or half price, unless you… the way to do that is to make it clear that you are buying it for them. You are personally sustaining the loss, it's not the project…

This raised questions about how far Fareshares' vision of community stretched, whose needs it could or should be meeting, and how a model premised on anarchist ideals, which often include a belief in spontaneous order, can become rigid.[58]

Martin's comments also highlight some of the same practical, financial concerns that Alison raised about the survival and financial sustainability of the co-op's activities, and how this interacted with Martin's personal, moral desire to do good by helping others in greater need than himself. If the principles by which the Rochdale Pioneers operated, now known as the Rochdale Principles, were based on the accrual of profits that could be shared amongst the co-op's members and also invested in hardship funds or other projects that supported the local community, then the decision to operate as a non-profit organisation undoubtedly changed the meaning and value of the goods that the food co-op sold, the dynamics of community and the logics of aid at Fareshares. From the very beginning, Fareshares had operated on a basis of non-profit. At first, this meant no mark-up on the goods at all, which was possible as this was a squatted space with very few overheads, as discussed in chapter one. Over time the mark-up crept up to 10 and then 15% as the food co-op's rent, utility bills and, at times, its deficit, grew.

Despite the project's desire to operate outside of the capitalist logics of wage labour, private ownership and profit maximisation, as Martin's comments highlighted, it was still reliant on capital if it wanted to keep going, and its capital was tied up in its stock. The co-op's goods, therefore, had to have a fixed exchange value in order for the project to be sustainable, and

[58] This spontaneous order is thought to evolve out of a situation, catering to the needs of those involved rather than being imposed either from above or by an external authority (Ward 2008:39).

for it to operate within the values of co-operation, mutual aid and equality. Nonetheless, there was not necessarily a need, or desire to increase sales as Martin recalled,

> One of the advantages of not having to [make a profit], because no one is trying to make a wage of it, and in the days where there really were no overheads and you could be more absolutist about the whole cost price, there was no profit in selling more. In fact, you were liable to lose more ... From the early days, we sold Whole Earth baked beans, and quite often Safeway's [a supermarket], as it was then, would be doing a loss leader on it. And people would keep an eye out and when they were doing a loss leader, we'd have a sign up saying 'you can get these cheaper in Safeway's'. You would be foolish if you were trying to make money out of it.

You can still hear similar sentiments today about how it is not necessarily a benefit to the project to have more shoppers.[59] These days, such comments are often made on the grounds that there is only so much space to store stock and so many people to volunteer, making this a demand on available resources rather than a means of improving the food co-op or becoming more successful (however that success might be measured in a project such as Fareshares).

Martin mentioned this and not being about to turn people who were affluent away, nor give additional support to those with greater needs, when I asked him whether there were often situations in which he wished he could give things away. While the latter highlighted some of the constraints of Fareshares' organisational ethos as an open access, non-profit food co-op, he clearly saw the ability to give *sales*, rather than *goods,* away as both a freedom and a benefit of a model in which profits are not required and more consumerist models of consumption are not the aim.

Within our discussion of these issues, Martin also highlighted some of the ways in which the model of mutuality can become disrupted by differing perceptions of the value of the goods on sale and their exchange,

[59] I deliberately try to avoid language such as 'customers', 'consumers' or 'shop' when describing these relationships of exchange as they were regularly contested by volunteer-members of the project as part of its performative work to reconfigure capitalist models of exchange.

> Sometimes, particularly when… and this would impinge on the thing about different cultural expectations as well … sometimes people would want to haggle over the vegetables or… and that was tricky because obviously there is something by that because you have to make decisions about 'oh we've got to get rid of these, they're not going to be so good by tomorrow', but yes, its awkward when someone says I'll give you 20p for this head of broccoli when you know you've had to pay twice as much for it…

Volunteering at Fareshares often involved negotiating a range of personal ethics along with the dual roles of autonomous volunteer and member of a collective that attempted to work by consensus. Collective members had to demonstrate an ability to use initiative to take the day-to-day decisions a shift required, while also being mindful of the necessity to present the collective and its interests. Within Fareshares' ideal of mutuality shoppers also had a role to play, as I have discussed here, and if they did not conform to these ideals of mutuality, this not only destabilised the food co-op's performative power, but could also create discomfort or hostility between volunteers and shoppers. Like Martin, I experienced the 'awkwardness' of a customer attempting to haggle, though only once. This occurred on a Saturday shift when I was working alone, and at the time, I felt very aware of my dual position as autonomous, decision-making individual and collective member.

While this kind of bargaining was rare in my experience, the most common cause of friction was shoppers who were unaware that this was not an ordinary shop. Responses could range from confusion to frustration, impatience and indignation, even if a volunteer attempted to explain the way things worked, or to help with the weighing scales and calculations. While some people would turn around and leave, deeming the transaction too far from their expectations of a quick purchase, others would get into the swing, enjoying the novelty of this alternative shopping experience. Inevitably, these frictions could lead to discussions of where the projects' practical and ideological boundaries lay. Amongst some of the more committed co-operators in the project, for example, there was a belief that in an ideal world, all those who shopped at Fareshares should also volunteer in the spirit of mutuality and equality. Interactions between Fareshares' volunteers and shoppers could, indeed, feel uneven, highlighting the necessity of reciprocating gifts (in this case the gift of time and energy) in

relatively equal measure if this system of mutuality is to work on fair and even terms (Graeber 2011:119).

Vivero-Pol et al. (2019:2–3) argue that '[t]he social construction of food as a commodity… denies its non-economic attributes' including its status as a human right and an element of culture 'in favour of an exclusive focus on its tradable features'. Doing so works to neglect some of the social features embedded in these goods as well as the relationships they reinforce, or create. Viewing these foods, instead, as belonging to no one, and to everyone worked to 'neutralise' their capitalist qualities (Müller 1991:25). In the case of Fareshares, protecting the food co-op's capital, and avoiding the hierarchical act of charitable giving also meant side-stepping rather than addressing issues of inequality despite a desire for an equitable society and food system.

The value of gifts and surplus food

St Hilda's also had many features that distinguished it from the classic consumer co-operative model promoted by the Rochdale Pioneers. As Jenny, the coordinator, and others at the community centre readily acknowledged, St Hilda's weekly food stall was not exactly a 'proper' co-operative as it lacked the decision-making practices associated with the model, as I will discuss further in chapter five. Instead, it was a project within the broader structure of the community centre (a registered charity). It had its own paid coordinator, who was an employee of the centre (Jenny), and relied heavily on volunteers to keep the project running.

Coming from a workers' co-op background, Jenny still felt a connection to the principles of co-operation and mutual aid though. So, she attempted to foster a sense of ownership, mutuality and autonomy amongst the volunteers by creating situations in which volunteers would support and teach each other various tasks. She also encouraged them to make autonomous decisions about some aspects of the day-to-day running of the food co-op, in order to foster a greater sense of shared time, labour and care amongst participants. Because of this, most volunteers were aware of their position as both recipients and givers of support, once again creating a porosity between those who give help and those who receive it (Malkki 2015) and therefore a sense of mutuality.

When I asked Jenny to define what the food co-op was, she started by suggesting that it was there for the community, a 'community service', before explaining that she did not actually

like the word ‘service’, but could not find a better one to try to explain what the food co-op did. It certainly was not a business, she suggested, as it did not work for profit, but it was very much about community and about volunteers. This notion of a ‘service’ with ‘service users’, another term which Jenny resisted, challenged the ideal of a volunteer-led initiative in which people worked collaboratively to keep the project running and to support each other as needed. Although Jenny acknowledged that the food co-op was not always as volunteer-led as she might have liked it to be, with her coordinating and making decisions about many aspects of the food co-op, the ideals of collaborative effort and mutual support were still a significant aspect of the project.

Like Fareshares, St Hilda’s was also a non-profit organisation, but here, this financial model had more to do with affordability and access than anti-capitalism. Instead, the project ran on funding, which paid the food co-op coordinator’s wages, while also covering training sessions and other expenditure. This further embroiled the food co-op in reciprocal arrangements, including more bureaucratic forms such as monitoring reports on how it was spending its money and whether objectives were being met, as I discuss further in chapter five. It also involved less formal arrangements such as attending events as a ‘representative’ recipient of funding or ensuring that funders were invited to the community centre’s events. These included annual general meetings, fun days for children and open days for the general public where many of the centre’s projects would be represented around the building.

As with Fareshares, there was also a mark-up here. This was around 20% on the goods the food co-op stocked in order to pay the delivery costs from Community Food Enterprise, their non-organic fruit and vegetable supplier, and to cover any breakages or wastage. At the time of our interview in the summer of 2017 though, Jenny was considering lowering this as the expansion into evening opening and bigger customer numbers on both shifts meant that the stall was sometimes doing more than breaking even, which was not in the spirit of what it was set up to do. Although the project did not make profit, gifting and discounting seemed to be less of an issue here. When new volunteers started, they often received items on sale in the food co-op – such as a food co-op tote bags and recipe books (as I did), and on special occasions or instances of ill health, food co-op volunteers or regular customers might also receive a gift from the stall. Regular customers sometimes also asked for discounts without this seeming to cause too much discomfort for either party. One Bengali woman, in particular,

regularly came at the end of the morning shift for discounted garlic and ginger, while a Bengali man who often came by in the evening with several young children would sometimes buy up all the apples, oranges and other fruit left on the stall at the end of the evening if he could get a good discount. This meant that more fresh fruit and vegetables were getting out into the area, and fresh produce could be bought in by the food co-op the following week, when these goods would otherwise have been discounted anyway.

Issues of charitable feeding also came up here, and they raised various questions about the value of food, food surplus and different forms of aid. While St Hilda's offered aid by providing support to volunteers and affordable fresh fruit and vegetables to the local neighbourhood, it was also regularly singled out as an aid recipient by a range of actors including its own suppliers, supermarkets and food charities which donate food surplus to a range of food banks, social cafés, charities and other community food schemes. Although St Hilda's had no intention of becoming a food bank, the food co-op was a project with a focus on access to affordable food, so, such donations could still make sense within its logics. The community centre was also working hard to balance its books, so free produce for the Older People Project's lunch club or other projects in the building, were well received.

At the food co-op itself, they could still cause 'awkwardnesses' though – to use Martin from Fareshares' term. And, again, these often revolved around visions of community and inequalities of need. When I first started with St Hilda's, one of their vegetable suppliers, Community Food Enterprise, would regularly bring us food donations, such as tinned soups with short shelf lives or day-old supermarket breads as they had connections with various supermarkets and food surplus charities. These were usually sold at around ten pence per tin or loaf, and always went down well with the customers. Customers from the Older People's Project were particularly enthusiastic as many of them enjoyed soup, soft white bread and a good bargain – and it definitely was a bargain rather than charity from their perspective. Over time, other produce also started to arrive, such as sacks of onions and potatoes. With these, Jenny often gave the chef in the Older People's Project first dibs. The rest was then sold at the food co-op for very low prices, such as 25 pence per kilo, making each onion worth one pence or less. This elicited surprise from some of the customers as their goods were weighed up and the prices rung through at the till, and from others there was, again, the sense of getting a good bargain.

One week, two large boxes of oversized courgettes arrived with Community Food Enterprise (CFE)'s delivery. As Hassan, the driver, was unloading the food co-op's order for the week, he explained to me that CFE had picked them up from a nearby farm as part of a gleaning initiative, whereby leftover crops were collected from commercial farmers if they could not be sold to supermarkets. Some of these were then redistributed to food co-ops, food banks and other community food projects that CFE worked with. After I had relayed this information to Jenny, she started to think about how we should price them, feeling very aware that we had received the giant courgettes for free. In the end she decided that we should let customers decide how much they wanted to pay for them.

On that day, the stall was outside and at the busiest times, Jenny was on the till while another volunteer and I were weighing and bagging goods. At other times we all rotated between the till, the scales and packing the blue plastic shopping bags. While the stall was outside, we always had a little more footfall, and this tended to include some of the more affluent residents of the area. I noticed that Jenny did not always mention the option to make a donation when pointing the courgettes out to some of our regular customers. Instead, she asked if they wanted a few before placing them in their shopping bag. With those who seemed more affluent, we all tended to mention the donation. This proved awkward for many of the customers as they were unsure how much to give. They were keen to check the numbers with us, even though we did not have a fixed price in mind either. In the end, many opted for around a pound, which, in relation to the general cost of items on the stall, especially the non-organic produce, was a lot of money. In fact, it was around the same as the cost of the organic marrows of the same size that we had been selling on the stall. This reflected some customers' own uncertainty over whether the project was as a service, or in fact a charity itself that they should be donating to in order to keep it going. It also raises questions about how people understand the value of food.

Figure 20 Free potatoes at St Hilda's. Celia Plender, 2017.

The following week, Jenny decided to drop the donation entirely and just give the vegetables away, which became the standard practice for all the donated vegetables from this point

onwards. While St Hilda's wanted to be inclusive, it also had a clear idea of who its services were aimed at and a strong awareness of the ways in which the demographic of the area was changing, as I discuss further in chapter four. This was reflected in Jenny's understanding of the customers most in need of the community centre's services or aid, which in this case came in the form of free over-sized courgettes. Arguably, Jenny's actions in relation to who to prioritise in terms of care and support can be seen as a performance of the food co-op's organisational ethos (Cloke, May, and Johnsen 2010:101) and commitment to its funders around food poverty and access to affordable, fresh fruit and vegetables. But as the centre also aspired towards inclusion by building friendships 'across diverse cultural and social backgrounds' (Jones 2016), removing the cost enabled the project to avoid the 'awkwardness' of having to come up with a price themselves while also taking away any indicators of different levels of need.

During my time at St Hilda's, issues of food surplus and charitable feeding continued to come up, and here too they raised various questions about value, reciprocity and responses to disparate levels of need. Sainsbury's was the first supermarket chain to contact the food co-op about taking some of their surplus food. Presumably this was part of a larger corporate social responsibility scheme. St Hilda's was a food co-op as opposed to a food bank and therefore attempted to enact forms of self-help and community support through access to more affordable fresh fruit and vegetables. It was also a community space where people from different backgrounds could come together and feel included and supported, and a project which offered opportunities to gain work skills. This represented something quite different to food aid or charity. The scheme still fell within the constellation of food insecurity alleviation schemes though, in terms of the other organisations that were in its network (including surplus food providers), the aims of the scheme itself and the kinds of funding it sought out. As such, Jenny could still see some positives in relation to food surplus donations, how they benefitted the centre and the food co-op's participants. While working through these issues though, she spoke to the Thursday evening advice worker to get her thoughts on the arrangement, and Lisa seemed to think it could be a good thing provided it was not a resource that people came to rely on. Once again, this could lead the food co-op into different territory in terms of its ethos, and as I will describe here, the food donations were not necessarily all that consistent.

Jenny's first pick up from a large branch of Sainsbury's in Whitechapel provided a bumper selection of tins, bags of grains and other packaged items. Apparently, they had been dealing with another community food scheme up until this point, but as they had not proved that reliable recently, there was a backlog of surplus goods. Jenny brought the goods back to the community centre on her bicycle, with a bike trailer that had been gathering dust in the centre's basement for some time. This was stacked high with tins, grains and other (mainly) dried goods. While some items such as baked beans and large sacks of rice went directly to the chef of the Older People's Project's lunch club, others were portioned off for the centre's advice project, which ran at the same time as the food co-op. The rest went onto a table in the food co-op, with a sign that read 'FREE for local community. Please Help yourself' (sic). Many people who shopped at the food co-op did take a tin or two irrespective of their means, and again, they seemed to see this as a perk rather than 'aid' or 'charity' of any kind. Some of the members of the Older People's Project were particularly pleased to get some freebies and even a few who did not shop regularly at the food co-op popped in to see if there was anything they liked the look of on the table. As Lambie-Mumford (2017:58) points out,

> Participating in the commercial process of shopping defines food experiences in the UK today, and this market-based experience (where people exercise choice and consumer power) is the socially recognised way in which people acquire food for themselves and their families.

St Hilda's food co-op worked within the logics of this socially recognised and acceptable form of food acquisition. Again, this differentiated the food co-op from other food aid schemes such food banks, in which service users can feel stigmatized or 'othered' by having to accept their own poverty and need for help (ibid. 2017:57); or prove their 'deservedness' for aid (Cloke, May, and Johnsen 2010:105), which is a common factor in emergency feeding (Lambie-Mumford 2017). In many food banks service users have little or no choice about what they receive in their food parcels, and this also accentuates the otherness of this means of food acquisition. Implementing a free table at the food co-op helped to avoid these dynamics.

Figure 21 Free table at St Hilda's. Celia Plender, 2017.

Jenny was very aware of the situations that different volunteers were in, though, and as a consequence, volunteers often confided in her about their lives and the issues they were dealing with in relation to anything from benefits to housing, health or family problems. She

told me that on occasion, if she knew someone was particularly struggling financially, she had invited them to go into the store cupboard to take what they wanted from the selection of supermarket goods. This meant they did not have to face the stigma of others seeing that they were in need which could have arisen if Jenny had offered them goods more publicly, or the risk of appearing to take more than their fair share of a common resource if it was on the free table. Once again, in these moments, disparate levels of need and abilities to reciprocate became apparent, creating a less mutual form of aid, but within the food co-op and Jenny's organisational ethos such practices not only made sense, but also expressed care. Through her discretion, Jenny attempted to alleviate any potential 'awkwardnesses' or stigma.

On the next occasion that Jenny went back to the branch in Whitechapel, at an agreed time, the staff seemed surprised to see her and there was nothing for her to take away, aside from some bananas that were so old that she said they were not even good enough to give away. After a few more failed attempts at communication, the relationship fizzled out.[60]

Shortly afterwards, the charity FareShare, which uses surplus food to tackle food poverty and food waste issues, contacted Jenny and facilitated a partnership between the food co-op and another supermarket chain, Tesco. FareShare had designed an app called 'Food Cloud' which connected supermarkets with community projects as part of their Community Food Connections programme (Caplan 2017:20), which was targeted at projects that worked on issues of food insecurity. This partnership had its issues too, however, as much of what the branch offered to begin with was day-old croissants and doughnuts from their bakery counter. The first time these arrived, they caused some excitement at the community centre as many of the projects (such as the Older People's Project and the crèche) had a nice selection of mid-morning snacks. The food co-op also had a pile on the table in the tea and coffee area. After a couple of weeks, the novelty wore off, however, giving way to questions about health and the value of such items to the food co-op and the centre. 'We don't have any say whatsoever in what we're given.' Jenny explained. 'We can choose not to take it. That's our choice really, but, the other stuff has to be negotiated, which has taken a little while to do.' To begin with, Jenny felt uncomfortable being picky about what the supermarket was giving her, again highlighting some of the social 'awkwardnesses' that can arise when a

[60] Jenny concluded that it seemed as if Sainsbury's might be in the process of putting a new system for dealing with their surplus in place, which meant that the relationship with St Hilda's had got a little lost along the way.

gift is rejected. As Jenny explained, 'you know, it's a donation, so we appreciate the donation. But we are also conscious of the health of the community.' While she generally believed in balance rather than abstinence when it came to a healthy diet (with plenty of healthy fruit and vegetables in there, of course), she was worried that all these bakery goods would tip the scales in the wrong direction. 'We were going to end up passing on a lot of sugar' she explained. After talking to the local branch about this a few times, they started offering more fruit and vegetables, which went straight into the Older People's Project kitchen. Requests for tins were less successful, as the supermarket branch was also working with other partners, and Jenny suspected some of these, such as local food banks, might have been 'a better fit' for the scheme.

Conclusions

Political-economic change has long been a catalyst for food co-operative activities, and at the heart of these practices is the desire to build some form of supportive community, while making food more affordable and accessible to selves and others. The models that food co-ops adhere to and their relationship to self-help, mutuality and aid can vary substantially, though, depending on their institutional ethos, practices and the values of those involved.

In both Fareshares and St Hilda's they try to create spaces of support, mutuality and equality – therefore attempting to remake 'the world so that it better serves the interests of humanity' (Calhoun, 2008 in Redfield 2012:457), desires which are significant to the concepts of mutual aid and humanitarianism. Nonetheless, competing values around reciprocal help, the desire to aid others and the need to keep a project running and financially viable can lead to some of the inequalities and hierarchies that each food co-op wishes to challenge.

In both places, food is perceived as something other than a simple commodity. Instead, it is the social medium around which the organisational ethos of each food co-op is enacted, whether it be an ethos of anti-capitalism or of care. Yet, the price and exchange value assigned to food and the ways in which others interact with a food co-ops' goods can still impact on its social values and its effectiveness at representing the food co-op's ethos.

At Fareshares, the social and ideological values of the collective determined the value of the food itself in terms of exchange. To deviate from a fixed price risked destabilising the aspects of the food co-op's performative work as an anti-capitalist project and its practices of mutual

aid, while also having the potential to impact on its financial sustainability. But, by sticking closely to this model of mutuality, some people's needs were recognised more, while others were excluded or 'othered' in some way.

At St Hilda's the arrival of surplus food also challenged the project's values, and raised questions about the appropriate financial value of the goods themselves. Again, this caused tensions between a desire for mutuality and inclusiveness and an organisational ethos and project funding which targeted a specific audience. The value attached to the items, therefore, came with a risk of singling people out as having a greater need for aid than others.

As Goodman et al. (2014:30) argue, the practices of local food initiatives are still 'messy, and bound up in imperfect politics' even if they attempt to work reflexively, acknowledging the 'imperfection of their actions' while pursuing their goals, and this is clearly borne out here in some of the tensions and 'awkwardnesses' that these moments of exchange create as different values and visions of aid interact with each other.

Part three – Building community, negotiating structure

Chapter four – Changing places, changing communities

Sharing food, things, space

Figure 22 Fareshares early 1990s. Source: https://www.facebook.com/FaresharesCoOp/photos/a.633554073359818/633575563357669/?type=3&theater

All of the people I spoke to who had been involved with Fareshares in the late 1980s and early '90s talked about how the long housing campaign on the Pullens Estate had created a strong sense of community around the area. And while the term 'community' itself is often critiqued within academic literature for its amorphousness and ambiguity (see for example Amit and Rapport 2002; Creed 2006; Amit and Rapport 2012), at both Fareshares and St Hilda's it was

regularly invoked as something meaningful and desirable.[61] As Adina, one of Fareshares' founder members, recalled,

> There was a fantastic sense of community round here, because all the squatters were being harassed by the council. They were constantly being evicted. And then there was this mass eviction – it was about 1986 I think. Because of this squatters' resistance, the tenants and squatters were really united about saving the Pullens… [there was a] really good sense of community.

Like the Boundary Estate in east London, the Pullens Estate in southeast London, where Fareshares food co-op is located, was also built in the late-19th century. It was constructed as a commercial project by master builder James Pullen between 1886 and 1901 (Batchelor 2011:5; Lyons n.d.). While the estate stayed in the Pullens' family until the late 1970s, by then the buildings had fallen into disrepair, and reports suggest that the family did not have the means to improve them. As a consequence, the estate was taken into council ownership in 1977 with a compulsory purchase order after a long period of unsuccessful negotiation (mudlark121 2018).

By the late 1970s, a third of all British citizens lived in council housing (Hyatt 2012:163) due to a boom in the construction of social housing which started in the 1930s. Many council estates were built in the UK in the interwar period as part of Prime Minister Lloyd George's 'homes for heroes' initiative aimed at ensuring that soldiers returning from World War One (whose deservingness of welfare could not be denied) had good homes to go to (ibid. 2012). In the post-war era, the implementation of a full welfare state was also accompanied by a boom in state-run social housing provision. Into the 1950s, '60s and '70s, this continued with further slum clearance and the construction of new towns and high-rise blocks (Kuenssberg 2015).

Elephant and Castle itself was substantially bombed during the Second World War and while the Pullens Estate survived, many other buildings in the area were destroyed. At the time, the local council, Southwark, was also embarking on a slum clearance campaign. These factors led to substantial redevelopment in the 1960s and '70s, including the first shopping centre in

[61] My exploration of community here, therefore drawn on 'what community *is understood to be* within' my 'research participants paradigms' (Rakopoulos 2017:161 emphasis original).

Europe, which was completed in 1965; the tallest residential tower block in London just opposite the shopping centre (Draper House, built 1965),[62] and what was said to be the largest single housing block in Europe (the Aylesbury Estate constructed between 1967-77), again built by London County Council. The Aylesbury consisted of 2,700 homes, in 60 concrete blocks, all connected by 11 miles of raised pedestrian walkways known as 'streets in the sky' (Boughton 2018:129–30; Beckett 2016). As all of these superlatives suggest, just as the construction of the Boundary Estate represented an aspirational time for civic architecture at the turn of the 20th century, so did the post-war regeneration of Elephant and Castle, during the 'Golden Age' of state welfare.

As part of this work, Southwark Council planned to demolish the Pullens, and construct a large, new council estate in its place. This proposal did not go down well with the estate's tenants, however. Many of them felt a strong sense of community and belonging in the Pullens, and did not want this to be disrupted. Large numbers of tenants were moved on nonetheless, and by 1983, blocks on three streets had been knocked down (mudlark121 2018). In retaliation against the threat of further demolition, the Pullens' tenants mounted a campaign to save and renovate the remaining blocks.

During this period, many of the empty units started to be filled by squatters, and this was generally welcomed by the council tenants as the squatters were proactive in maintaining the flats and renovating the plumbing and wiring (Batchelor 2011:32; mudlark121 2018). In fact, the squatters and tenants became united in their desire to save the Pullens from demolition. After a long campaign co-ordinated collectively by the two groups (which included the attempted mass eviction of the Pullens' squatters discussed in chapter one), Southwark finally agreed for both to stay, and started a programme of improvements to the estate. In the long run, many of the squatters were also granted official tenancies (Batchelor 2011:32–5). Of the original 684 flats that made up the Pullens Estate before 1977, 360 still remain today (Southwark Council Regeneration Department 2006:15).

All sorts of events took place to bring people together around the estate to campaign and to socialise. People in the area even put on a 'buskers' opera', which was written by Adina's boyfriend, to highlight the struggles taking place within the Pullens. There was also a strong

[62] Where I lived in the early 2000s.

sense of connection with Fareshares in the neighbourhood, even from people who did not necessarily shop there. As founder-member Martin told me,

> …there was this quite unusual sense of community which involved people who were squatters, had been squatters, and people who had been council tenants previously on the Pullens who had refused to leave and then fought to save the Estate, and in the early years, twice, the council made quite big efforts to evict [Fareshares]. And amongst the most vocal of Fareshares' supporters, who really felt aggrieved and 'this is our co-operative, this is our thing, you can't touch it!' – were people who never used Fareshares, or sort of came in and had a chat sort of thing. And that really struck me that they weren't… the food and politics behind it weren't really their thing. But yeah, it really had a sense of ownership about it. 'Hands off our project!'

Figure 23 Buskers' opera poster (left) and Pullens Festival poster (right). Shared by Adina.

Fareshares was as much a place to hang out as it was a retail space – 'not a shop, an experiment in Community (sic)' as one of its slogans suggested. This evoked a common trope in activist thinking, whereby community, as a form of affective sociality is an important aspect

of their alternative visions (Young 1986). Such an atmosphere was arguably all the more important within a space of exchange such as a food co-op, as it worked to oppose the perceived coldness and immorality of more capitalist forms. The presence of two battered old armchairs draped in colourful patterned fabric, where people could sit and chat added to this atmosphere of informality and sociability.

Colomba, who arrived on the Pullens in the early 1990s and soon became a Fareshares visitor, then volunteer, told me that Fareshares was a community 'hub'. She also had a sense that the food co-op was an important part of the wider Pullens community – a 'loving, sharing community' as she described it. She recalled,

> Volunteers [at Fareshares] were your neighbours and people you knew from the area. People would give each other advice. The Pullens was amazing like that. You couldn't walk anywhere without talking to people.

There was a strong sense of shared affections, and shared resources. She reminisced about how people used to have parties on the rooves of the buildings. As the spaces were undivided, everyone could use them. 'People would often knock on your door – 'have you got some sugar, or do you need some oil?'' she told me. 'It was all about sharing. People were sharing food, things, space.'

These people were undoubtedly part of 'a multitude of social networks and narratives of identity and belonging' all of them claimed at different times in different ways by the various members of the area. But the Pullens and the fight for its survival, and by extension Fareshares, provided 'a space in which it was possible… for a particular sense of community to emerge' (Crehan 2006:73).

As I sat and chatted with Adina and Colomba around the kitchen table of the Pullens flat where Colomba has lived for over two decades, both of them seemed to feel a sense of sadness at the perceived loss of community here. Echoing a classic connection between concepts of 'community' and nostalgia (Creed 2006:3; Crehan 2006:73), they told me how people used to knock on the door, talk to each other face to face and make spontaneous arrangements. Few had phones in their homes (especially not the squatters), let alone the newer forms of communication technology that are available to much of the population

today. The weakening sense of community that they lamented was framed in relation to these changes to technology as well as lack of time, changing lifestyles (both personally and societally) and changing tenants within the estate and the wider area as a consequence, of 'right to buy' and regeneration, which I elaborate further in the following section.

As Alexander notes, space itself contains 'multiple temporalities' (Alexander and Knowles in Alexander 2011:206). It is a 'locus for multiple contradictory claims, histories, trajectories, migrations, which shape the experience of its inhabitants and their attachments to place.' (Alexander 2011:207; see also Massey 2005:148) It is on these grounds that this section explores the spaces and places of Fareshares and St Hilda's East in both past and present contexts. Doing so offers insights into how these histories and temporalities intersect with contemporary social, economic and state structures and ideologies in relation to welfare, housing and capital to inform the experiences of those involved with each food co-op, and their attempts at community-building. I look first from a more structural perspective at the right to buy, implemented by the Conservative Government in 1980, and the increased commoditisation of property as an investment opportunity (typically for overseas buyers) rather than as a common good (Minton 2017). I assess some of the ways in which each of these has changed the demographics and sense of community around Elephant and Castle. I then look at the changing demographics of East London, the prevalence of the Bengali diaspora community in Tower Hamlets since the 1970s and the ways in which the area is being gentrified. I then move on to a more in-depth analysis of each food co-op's visions of community. To do this, I look at their place-making and community-building practices and the ways in which Fareshares and St Hilda's understand and try to address issues of diversity and changing demographics.

Crisis and 'regeneration'

In 1980, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government implemented the right for council tenants, who had rented a property for at least three years (later reduced to two), to buy their council homes at much reduced rates (Boughton 2018:170). 'Right to buy' as the policy is known, was seen as a positive move by many council tenants as it allowed them to access the housing market in a way that might never have been possible otherwise (and later to benefit substantially from the sale of their former council properties in some cases as housing prices have risen by more than 400% in the UK since 1980 (Sunlife 2016)). It also reduced the

quantity of council housing stock, however, and meant that local authorities were unable to invest as much in the maintenance of remaining council properties due to reduced revenues (Katharine Tyler 2015:1174). By 1997 a quarter of all council housing had been sold, including many flats within the Pullens and Boundary Estates.

Over time, as housing has been bought and sold on (at market value), 'Right to Buy has substantially altered the social composition of council housing estates in London by creating a new axis of fragmentation and division along tenure lines' (Lees and Ferreri 2016:15). This has undoubtedly altered perceptions of community, neighbourhood and belonging as Adina and Colomba's sentiments attest.

While reminiscing about what it was like to squat in the area in the 1980s, Adina pointed out one of the ironies of London housing today,

> There were a lot of empty spaces around here. There still are, but you can't get into them – like the fancy new tower bocks owned by Chinese businessmen and Russian Oligarchs. All brand new, empty flats, no one lives in them. If you want to live in them, it costs like a million quid.

Over the last decade or so, the London skyline has changed substantially as slick, new buildings have been erected with the aid of overseas investment. A trend that started soon after the economic crash of 2008 (Sassen 2015). Although an inordinately high number of the super-rich choose to live in London, others merely invest in property there, meaning that there are many 'ghost towers' – luxury blocks of flats bought as investments rather than homes, which are barely occupied. Some have dubbed this kind of construction 'necrotecture' due to the lifeless, empty state of these buildings (Atkinson 2019).[63]

As these have gone up, so too have rental and purchase housing prices in the capital, causing what is described as a UK-wide housing crisis, with London worst affected (Wilde 2017). This crisis means that many people 'cannot afford their rent and… are forced to live in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions' (London City Hall 2017). Home ownership is also out of the question for many Londoners. As Wilde highlights,

[63] This form of investment is now said to be slowing down due to the economic uncertainties of Brexit (Neate 2018).

> Since the early 1980s, a succession of policies has eroded the availability of public housing, removed rights and protections in the private rented sector, aggressively gentrified inner-city boroughs and privileged the interests of developers and speculators over the needs of working-class residents. (2017:16)

Austerity has only worsened the situation, reducing local authority budgets, and implementing caps on housing benefits – the state subsidy that supplements rent for those on low incomes when there is a shortfall (ibid.). It also raises the same issues around deservingness – who is seen as a legitimate subject of aid, how and in what quantities they should receive it – and the more punitive system of welfare now in place in this country, which I discussed in chapter two.

One of the starkest consequences of these council cuts was the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017, a 1970s council-built block in West London. It killed at least 71 people and left many more injured and displaced. Along with inadequate fire safety measures (something that tenants had been raising concerns about for years), it was the consequence of Kensington and Chelsea Council's choice to use highly flammable cladding in a recent refurbishment of the building, as it was cheaper than the fire-resistant kind. Firefighters had never seen a tower block fire escalate so fast or so fiercely.

The tragedy of Grenfell was all the more bitter as Kensington and Chelsea, is one of the richest areas in the whole of the UK (Wills 2018). This not only highlighted the extreme disparities between living conditions for people within London, but also 'the deadly inequalities of safety and security that characterise contemporary urban life' (Maddens in Wilde 2017:16). Grenfell came up often in my fieldsites in the days that followed the fire as we all came to terms with the extent of inequality within the city as well as the fatal consequences of austerity and the housing crisis.

To many of the people I spoke to in Elephant and Castle, the new buildings going up all over the area were towering symbols of affluence in the face of economic inequalities, displacement and changing communities in Southwark and London more broadly – a city that is increasingly difficult to get by in due to the cost of living. The economic inequalities these blocks represented were on the minds of many of those involved with Fareshares while I was there, and for good reason. In recent years, the Borough of Southwark, where Elephant and

Castle is located has been the 41st most deprived borough in the country (out of 326) and 12th most deprived of the 33 boroughs in London (Southwark Stats n.d.).

Figure 24 1960s block Draper House (right) and Strata SE1 (left), built in 2010. Celia Plender, 2017.

Concerns about inequality in the area were only exacerbated by the three billion pound, 15 year redevelopment programme (Southwark Council 2019) taking place in Elephant and Castle at the time, which involved collaborations between Southwark Council and multinational, overseas construction companies such as the Australian firm Lendlease. This is one of the largest schemes of its kind in Europe to date (Sutherland 2008:4). Many people in the area saw it as a sign that within the workings of global capitalism and the buoyancy of the British economy, property's role as a commodity was being put above the housing needs of British citizens. So far, this project has included the demolition of the 1,212 flats and maisonettes on the Heygate Estate – a sister estate to the Aylesbury. The Aylesbury itself is also in the middle of a process of tenant rehousing and building demolition in order to make way for new developments. Its tenants are still campaigning hard to halt the progress of this project, though (Aylesbury Tenants First n.d.).

In recent years such construction projects have come to be framed as 'regeneration' – a word often used by local authorities to portray the work taking place in a more positive light. This is seen by many as a means of glossing over some of the 'problematic processes' of contemporary urban change at play in such projects (Campkin, Roberts, and Ross 2014:2). These inner-city redevelopments often involve the demolition of council housing and its replacement with 'new-build mixed income communities' with much smaller proportions of social housing, as is happening with the Aylesbury and Heygate Estates (Lees and Ferreri 2016:14). The so-called 'affordable' homes that go up in their place 'are unaffordable precisely to those who need them most' (Boughton 2018:224). This has led some to frame such projects as modern day forms of 'slum clearance' where the slums are the council housing estates that are deliberately rundown and then presented as sites of vice and urban decay in order to justify their demolition (Lees and Ferreri 2016:14). In the case of the Aylesbury and Heygate, while the design of both estates was seen as the height of innovation at the time of construction, they have since been criticised for shoddy workmanship and the instances of social isolation and crime that they facilitate (Boughton 2018:153). Both have been labelled time and again as 'sink estates', and portrayed by the media and mainstream politics as symbols of poverty, crime and inequality.[64] In 1997, for example, Tony Blair made

[64] They have also been featured in various films and TV programmes, creating backdrops of urban decay. These include post-apocalyptic, British sci-fi comedy *Attack the Block* (2011), Hollywood zombie movie *World War Z*

his first speech as Prime Minister at The Aylesbury Estate. He evocatively declared that '[t]here are estates where the biggest employer is the drugs industry, where all that is left of the high hopes of the post-war planners is derelict concrete' (Blair 1997 in Boughton 2018:219). 'Sink Estates' were also a significant feature of the Conservative Party under David Cameron's discourse of 'Broken Britain' and subsequent welfare and housing reform (Gentleman 2010; Slater 2018).

Figure 25 56a Infoshop archive sign. Celia Plender, 2017.

Campkin (2013:164) suggests that the financial benefits of public infrastructural development combined with private sector property investment are a neoliberal means for local authorities to manage council housing waiting lists and high levels of debt in a period of austerity. Although aimed at improving areas most in need of socioeconomic support, in principle, he argues that regeneration plans are, in fact, thinly veiled gentrification strategies,

> focused on raising land values, opening new markets, and attracting the 'right' kind of businesses and residents to settle – with the assumption of a trickle down effect in

(2013), in which Brad Pitt was a producer, and gritty revenge film *Harry Brown* (2009) starring former Elephant and Castle resident, Michael Caine.

which this new wealth will benefit at least some of the existing communities (ibid. 2013:164).

Others question whether the 'trickle down' effect really does reach those who need it most (ibid.).

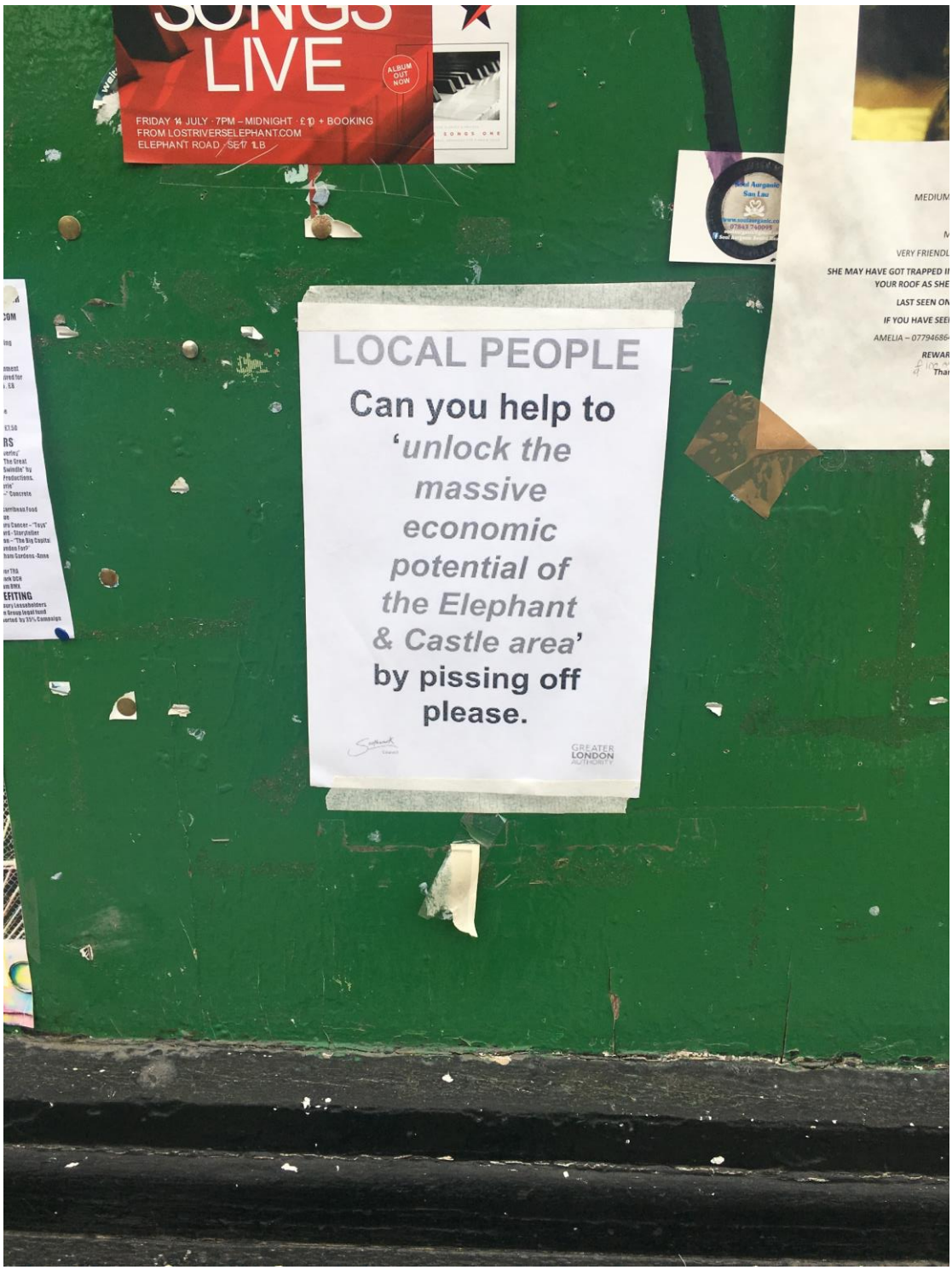


Figure 26 Poster on the noticeboard outside Fareshares. Celia Plender, 2017.

Concerns about regeneration and gentrification have led to a range of campaigns and forms of activism within the area to save the sites earmarked for demolition, contest the processes of regeneration at work, fight for higher proportions of social housing to be built within these public-private partnership construction schemes, and to highlight the ways in which they are leading to gentrification in the area. This has included protests, and other forms of direct action, both big and small; refusals by tenants to leave their homes on estates set to be demolished; awareness raising walks through these estates; conversations with the press; whole blogs devoted to the gentrification of the area such as Southwark Notes; and much lobbying of the local council by various parties (see for example Lees and Ferreri 2016; Hancox 2018b; Southwark Notes n.d.; Hill 2016; Walking The Rip-Off n.d.; Latin Elephant n.d.; 35% Campaign n.d.). 56a Infoshop, which is in the same building as Fareshares, has been active in various forms of anti-gentrification activism as part of this work, including participating in various walking tours, and hosting visits to Southwark Notes' material in the radical archive they house there. While I was at Fareshares, people would also regularly leave leaflets and posters in the food co-op and other parts of the building.

Waves of migration

In East London, a lot has also changed since St Hilda's and the Boundary Estate first came into being. There has been much negotiation and contestation over place-making, and consideration of forms of community-building. As St Hilda's East's website acknowledges, the community centre has,

> …changed immensely since being established in 1889… The pioneering [Cheltenham Ladies' College] Guild members who started our history over a century ago might not recognise the buildings now, and they would certainly be surprised by many of the changes to the surrounding area. (St Hilda's East Community Centre n.d.)

As discussed in chapter two, though, the centre believes that the Guild members would still recognise the centre's aims in relation to the role of education, recreation and social care in enabling and empowering people facing deprivation and social exclusion.

The changes the website mentions include the building on Club Row that houses St Hilda's East, which was erected in the 1994. A purpose-built, red and black brick building with space

for a sports hall, small roof garden, two café-style kitchens and rooms of many different shapes and sizes to accommodate its various projects. The nearby Boundary Estate's tall, red-brick tenement blocks look much the same though,[65] and the two sites are still strongly connected.

Figure 27 St Hilda's East today. Celia Plender, 2017.

In terms of who lives within the area, this too has changed substantially. The East End has always seen flows of migration due, in part, to its location near the City and the docks. Once home to the Huguenot community who brought silk weaving skills to the area in the 17th and

[65] These are now grade 2 listed, meaning they are protected from significant alteration or demolition.

18th century, during the 19th century, many Irish people who left their country due to poverty and famine took up work in East End sweatshops. Then, from the late-1800s onwards, the pogroms of Eastern Europe brought Jewish refugees to the area (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:15–16; Eade 2001:125). A large number of Jewish immigrants worked in the garment industry, with Brick Lane, in particular, as a hub of these activities. The Boundary was home to numerous successful artisanal Jewish immigrants, a cause for resentment amongst some of the 'indigenous' working classes who were unable to gain access to it (Durlacher 2012; Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:16). As Eade states,

> To the subtle distinctions of status among working-class families were added the ethnic differences of religion, language, and country of origin, as well as increasingly racialized divisions shaped by antisemitism and virulent nationalism and imperialism of the late Victorian period. (Eade 2001:125)

By the 1950s, much of the Jewish community had moved on into more modern inter- and post-war council housing with hot running water and private toilets, or out to the leafier, and often more affluent, suburbs and new towns (Durlacher 2012; Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:18; Eade 2001:127).[66] Between 1931 and 1961 the population of Bethnal Green halved, and the Boundary itself had multiple empty properties (Durlacher 2012). It was not long before another community was able to fill the spaces though, as residents from the region of pre-partition India known as West Bengal grew substantially from the 1960s onwards.

People from modern-day Bangladesh (largely from the Sylhet region) have, in fact, been in the East End since the end of the 18th century when accommodation was set up for Indian seamen (*Lascars*) who came to the country via East India Company ships. After the partition of India in 1947, more chose to settle there. By the 1950s, several hundred East Pakistani men were living and working in the East End, largely in the catering trade as well as clothing and leather production (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:39). These numbers continued to grow steadily with a spike after the civil war with Pakistan, which led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, and the period of political turbulence that followed. This persuaded many of the

[66] A trend of outmigration that was seen throughout the city as mentioned in the introduction.

married men working in the UK to try to bring over their wives and children (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:43–4).

Today, the borough of Tower Hamlets, where St Hilda's it located, has the largest population of people of Bangladeshi heritage in the UK – around 30% of the inhabitants of the borough in 2018 (Tower Hamlets Council 2018), and Brick Lane is the heart of the Bengali community. Along with myriad curry houses, halal butchers and grocery shops, the street still retains aspects of its earlier history too, such as the Jewish bagel shops, which are still a destination in the area. One building, in particular, highlights the area's history of migration as it has been through many iterations as a Huguenot, then Methodist chapel, a Synagogue and now a mosque (Kershen 2015).

Living conditions for this burgeoning Bengali community were often poor. Multiple families were packed into low-quality, private rental properties and semi-derelict buildings. As a consequence, some Bengali people started to squat. Over time, many chose to join the active squatters' movement in the area to occupy empty buildings including empty council properties, which were numerous. By 1976, the Bengali Housing Action Group (BHAG) had formed to connect the various Bengali squatting groups in operation. It also facilitated the occupation of prospective new squats, and a waiting list of those who needed homes. According to Dench et al. (2006:46), through this housing activism and campaign work, many within the Bengali community were also developing a better understanding of their rights as British citizens. This work along with the sheer volume of Bengali squatters in the area around Brick Lane eventually put sufficient pressure on the local council and the Greater London Authority to rehouse many of the Bengali squatters into properly maintained homes as official council tenants (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:46–9). These properties included the Boundary Estate, where 60 Bengali families were settled in the late 1970s (Durlacher 2012).

Just as the Jewish community before them was compelled to respond to racism and discrimination,[67] the Bengali community has had much cause to mobilise. The death of Altab Ali, in 1978, is seen by many as a pivotal moment in Bengali self-organisation against racism in the East End. This culminated in a funeral march from Brick Lane to Westminster in which

[67] Most famously in the Battle of Cable Street in 1936, in which Jewish anti-fascists and communists clashed with Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists and won.

as many as 10,000 may have taken part (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:50; Alexander 2011:2008–2011). This was a significant moment in Bengali place-making, as the community defended its claim to the area around Brick Lane (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006:50; Alexander 2011:211), defining it as the 'symbolic heartland of Britain's Bengali community' (ibid.).

While the beginning of the New Labour years saw a heightened political interest in concepts of multiculturalism (Modood 2007:10), as I discussed in chapter one, the London bombings of 7 July 2005 (often called 7/7) in which four radical Islamic terrorists detonated bombs on three underground trains and a double-decker bus, are said to have caused the 'death of mulitculturalism' in Britain (Back, Sinha, and Bryan 2012:140; see also Modood 2007:11–12). The combination of this, and the terrorist attacks in the USA on the 11th of September 2001 (9/11), caused a rise in Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims and people of Asian heritage in the Western world (Hanes and Machin 2014). As a majority Muslim community, this undoubtedly has its impact on Bengalis in East London. Back et al. (2012:140) suggest that there have long been 'hierarchies of belonging' within the East End. While white East Enders (at the top of the hierarchy) have 'automatic claims' to the area, 'the black, Asian and Bengali presence is 'tolerated' as long as it does not challenge the terms of the hierarchy itself.' They go on to suggest that 'these processes of ordering are invigorated by new social forces that have been unleashed post-9/11.' The Bengali community has often also been accused of self-segregation from the rest of British society (Alexander 2011). After 9/11 and 7/7, the connections between this 'not mixing' and notions of British, Asian Muslims as culturally other, as an 'the enemy within' which might endanger the nation, its security, and identity, have only hardened (Tyler 2017:1892).[68] In policy terms this heightened concern about Islamic terrorism has also had impacts such as increased scrutiny of the immigration status of potential patients by healthcare officials, and the monitoring of school and university students for religious extremism or visa infractions (Back, Sinha, and Bryan 2012:140).

[68] There has also been a high-profile incident in which three Bengali teenaged girls from Tower Hamlets ran away to become 'Jihadi brides' in 2015. This further exacerbated connections between the Bengali community and terrorist groups such as ISIS. The girls were in the news again in 2019 when one of them, Shamima Begum, attempted to return to the UK. Instead, she had her citizenship stripped by the Conservative Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, on the grounds that she was a Bangladeshi citizen. She had never visited the country that her parents come from (Hymas 2019).

Figure 28 'This melting pot is at boiling point' graffiti near Shoreditch Overground Station. Celia Plender, 2018.

Since the Brexit vote, many reports have suggested that racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic hate crimes have risen further (Weaver 2018). As I discussed in the introduction and chapter one in relation to the connected rise in nationalist populism, within the discourses of both populism and racist, xenophobic or Islamophobic sentiments there can be a sense of nostalgic loss and yearning for a time when Britain is perceived to have been 'better' in terms of living conditions. Within such discourses it is often believed that there was cohesion, and that communities were more racially and ethnically homogenous (Hage 2003:20–1). Clearly, such sentiments can also work to supress the variety of different people's experiences or the negative aspects of the past (such as the discrepancy in living standards between people of different identities that I discussed in chapter two) in favour of more 'reassuring images' (Shaw and Chase 1989:1 in Angé and Berliner 2016:4).

Figure 29 St Hilda's East. Celia Plender, 2017.

Rupert, St Hilda's East's director since 2001, first worked with the community centre from 1987 to 1996. He started as a community development worker in older people's services and then moved on to campaigning with a pensioners' action group. In Rupert's earlier years at the centre, there were still a lot of Bengali families living on the Boundary Estate. He suggested that at this time, it was mainly filled with 'ordinary people' and 'families'. There were also the beginnings of a few 'professionals' moving onto the Boundary.

Rupert felt that the estate and the area around Shoreditch and Bethnal Green had 'completely changed since then.' As lots of flats had been bought and sold under right to buy, or bought and rented out. He said,

> So, there are still Bangladeshi families living on the estate, there are still individuals on lower incomes on the estate, but there are also a lot of professionals and well-off people who might work in the City or something. So there's a real mixture on this estate.

He also pointed out various buildings in view of St Hilda's that used to be textile and leather factories which are now gone. He told me,

> Now it's completely... I think gentrified doesn't do justice to the word actually… it's more than gentrified. It's been completely, that area's been completely taken over by designer shops… quite bizarre, very up end, very expensive, aimed-at-tourist clothes shops… there's a shoe shop, that's actually been there for some years, a designer shoe shop where shoes will set you back at least £250, you know, things like that. So, in terms of the factories and shops that used to exist in the area, a complete sort of cleansing. I'm not sure if you'd call it social cleansing, but some kind of cleansing has taken place which means that in the local area, for the people that are left behind, there are not some of the facilities or the area that was. I'm pretty sure that there are still a hell of a lot of people in the vicinity who are on low incomes.

Although 40% of Londoners are from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (The Mayor of London 2017:12), as the Mayor's London Plan has previously acknowledged, even though 'London's economy has been generally successful over the past twenty years, not everyone has benefitted'. In fact, deprivation is often 'concentrated among Black, Asian and ethnic minority' Londoners, as well as those with disabilities (Greater London Authority 2011:23). As a consequence, the impacts of processes such as regeneration and gentrification can often be particularly harsh for residents from these groups. Tower Hamlets ranks highly on multiple indices of deprivation. It has the highest rate of both child and pensioner poverty in the whole of the UK (Tower Hamlets Council n.d.). In Weavers Ward, where St Hilda's is located, 41.5% of children and 52.4% of older people are in income deprived households (Tower Hamlets Council 2015).

As the exploration of the history of the area in chapter two highlighted, 'Tower Hamlets has a longstanding association with poverty and social decay' and this is 'strongly linked to its history as a space of immigration and a zone of transition' according to Alexander (2011:213). Within the Bengali population in Britain, in particular, she notes that they are often extremely economically marginalised with 65% of Bengali families living below the poverty line. Unemployment rates are also considerably higher for Bengalis in Britain compared to white people – four times higher for men and six times higher for women (Alexander 2011:213).

Over time, the City has encroached on the East End, with offices and city workers moving into the area, while the garment industry, which drew many immigrants there in different periods,

has moved further east towards Whitechapel (Eade 2001:129). As Rupert acknowledged, the area around St Hilda's is seen as a site of rapid gentrification. As well as the city workers who now live there, Shoreditch and surrounding neighbourhoods are also associated with the creative industries and with 'hipsters'. And when many people in the area describe the people and places around Shoreditch as 'hipster', this is often more of an accusation than a compliment on someone's style or entrepreneurial skills.[69]

The financial crisis hit some of the Bengali businesses on Brick Lane particularly hard. Due to the sheer number of curry houses, there was already fierce competition between them, and in a harsh economic environment, it became harder for such businesses to maintain this competition. As the restaurants closed, many of them were replaced with independent businesses that might be characterised as 'hipster' such as independent coffee shops, cake shops, plus the odd estate agent to facilitate the arrival of more affluent occupants to the area. All of these were 'a reflection of the growing inequality and processes of exclusion suffusing east London' (Rhys-Taylor n.d.).

Elephant and Castle has also long been a racially and ethnically diverse area. In the Borough of Southwark 46% of the population came from BAME backgrounds in 2018 (Southwark Council 2018), while the wards that make up Elephant and Castle have populations of between 52% (East Walworth) 48% (Newington) and (Faraday) 61% BAME. As well as a large number of black British, African and Caribbean people (around 24.6%) (Krausova 2018:12), Elephant and Castle also has a large Latin American community, which Roman-Velazquez suggests is both the largest and the oldest in the city (2014:23). Many within BAME groups, own small businesses in and around the area, and as Elephant and Castle goes through another wave or regeneration, this is leading to much concern amongst local residents and activists about local livelihoods and about the maintenance of a racially, ethnically and economically diverse community in Elephant and Castle (Roman-Velazquez 2014; Hancox 2018b).

[69] Imogen Tyler (2015:506) notes that the figure of the 'middle-class urban hipster' came into usage at the same time as the revival of the benefit scrounger, after the financial crisis of 2008. She suggests that 'these class figures are pitted against each other, ruthlessly employed to divide people along a vampiric axis of blame for diminishing social resources.' And as her article highlights, the media is a common site for such representations.

Inclusion and exclusion

Figure 30 Fareshares today. Celia Plender, 2015.

When I asked Holly, a white, British volunteer at Fareshares, about the kind of issues that concerned her in the UK during our interview in 2017 she told me,

> I feel really conscious about housing, transport and inequality. I think inequality affects so many different things, especially in London 'cause it's just so visible here. It's just so obvious it's like a cartoon of itself. It's like if you go out to Old Street on a Friday [an area near to St Hilda's well known for clubs and bars], there's people going out and getting pissed, and then there's just someone sitting on the floor [i.e. a homeless person].

Many of the people I worked with at Fareshares had a strong sense of the growing inequalities within the city, and within Elephant and Castle itself. While Holly had only been involved with Fareshares for just over a year at the time of our interview, she told me 'a friend of a friend' had been visiting the food co-op since the 1990s. He had told her that the people who came

into Fareshares now are ‘a bit different’. Reflecting what she perceived as a wider trend in London, she told me it was ‘all a bit posher now’. She went on to explain,

> I think there are people who have moved into the area into the new flats and… some of the products we sell, they might not be buying the bulk lentils, but some of the products we sell are fancy and nice. So, maybe that appeals to the people who are more conscious of those kinds of varieties of products, we've got coconut oil… and that's fashionable now.

Organic, extra virgin coconut oil is also expensive, which no doubt makes it more financially accessible to some than others.

I often heard similar comments from other volunteers as they expressed discomfort at the rising number of visitors to Fareshares who appeared to be more affluent. Shoppers who were likely to have been drawn to Elephant and Castle because of the new housing and new facilities popping up as part of its regeneration. For these shoppers, Fareshares might be an amusing novelty or a useful source of cheap, unpackaged wholefoods rather than something more radical. Rather than promoting the forms of community to which the food co-op’s motto aspired, their interactions at the co-op could potentially have a more transactional quality.

The issue of inequality within the area led some members of the food co-op to question how it could be serving the local area better, and what the ‘community’ might actually want from the food co-op. Within these conversations the ‘community’ in question seemed to be imagined as less affluent and more racially and ethnically diverse than those who actually shopped and volunteered at Fareshares, a largely white, if not necessarily affluent collective. Even though there was an awareness that beyond the bulk sacks of wholegrains, many of the goods stocked in the food co-op would still be inaccessible to people on very low incomes, there *was* a desire for the shop to be financially accessible to a wider audience.

These questions about inclusion and exclusion, mirror classic debates within alternative food network (AFN) literature, in which such schemes are criticised for their elitism (Kneafsey et al. 2008; Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014) – due to the augmented prices which often accompany organic, local, fairly-traded or less industrially produced goods. There have also been calls for more AFNs to attempt to tackle issues of food access or food poverty as well as

environmental sustainability, or changes within the global, industrial food system (Caraher and Dowler 2014). Some scholars claim that schemes such as food co-ops and buying clubs have a greater capacity for inclusivity than other forms of AFNs due to factors such as volunteer labour, which keeps mark-ups low (Little, et al., 2010; Renting et al., 2012). Even with a low mark-up though, some of the organic products at Fareshares could be expensive, even for people who had shopped there before. I remember one occasion when a customer who had recently started shopping at Fareshares due to health-related dietary changes had to put back half of his shopping after tallying up his goods. The organic avocadoes, in particular, went straight back onto the shelf. Instead, he stuck to the cheaper grains and pulses. Nuala, a more recent volunteer (white, Irish) who was on ill-health-related benefits, also told me that many of the products that Fareshares sold were out of her price range. There was one whole wall of goods, ranging from organic olive oil to the coconut oil, which felt alien to her due to the price of the items it housed.

Ed (white, British), who I did the Wednesday unpacking shift with, found this issue of price particularly troubling as someone who lived frugally due to a combination of personal politics, working-class identity and a low income.[70] Having worked in advice services, he was also keenly aware of the hardship and financial constraints that some people within the city were subject to. He told me that when he had first started at Fareshares, he had compared the prices of various items with similar (i.e. organic or fairly-traded) products at the supermarket out of an interest in accessibility. He had not been all that pleased with many of the results.

While many people saw shopping at Fareshares as one of the perks of volunteering there, he chose not to. As he explained to me, the co-op already had enough shoppers, so he chose to contribute to the collective in other ways, and get his groceries from cheaper sources such as street markets, and cash and carries. Despite a concern for issues such as climate change (which had previously led him to work with Greenpeace), issues of inequality and the ideology of co-operativism were more significant aspects of his everyday politics. He focused his energies there in terms of the work or volunteering he did and the lifestyle choices he made rather than buying organic goods.

[70] In fact, he was even the author of a self-published book about living on a budget, which had been stocked at the Infoshop at one point.

In terms of diversity, members at Fareshares generally acknowledged that the collective was diverse in terms of age, sexuality and nationality, but less so in terms of race as most of Fareshares' members were white. The customer-base was considerably more ethnically and racially diverse than the members, however. In terms of class, a reasonable proportion of those I interviewed identifying as working class,[71] although more would present or identify as middle class. There were also volunteers with mental health issues and less severe physical disabilities.

Reflecting on the lack of diversity amongst members at Fareshares, Zoe (a white-identifying Belgian, woman) told me, 'I think we're very, very white. I'm not sure why', and her uncertainty was echoed by other members too, although many of them acknowledged the fact that the collective was predominantly white. Similarly, founder-member Martin (a white, British man) suggested that even in the early days it was not as diverse as he would have liked it to be, not because their 'efforts at outreach failed', but because they were 'feeble and ill thought out'.

Within the study of whiteness, and alternative food networks, the level of reflexivity shown at Fareshares in relation to the racial structuring of white people is not unusual (Frankenberg 1993). As scholars of whiteness have highlighted, one of its characteristics is its own invisibility, as a 'set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and un-named' (Frankenberg 1993:1).[72] As Slocum (2007:526) points out, whiteness is not uncommon in schemes which attempt to increase access to healthy or organic foods. Although the ideals of healthy food or a healthy environment are not inherently white, 'the objectives, tendencies, strategies, the emphases and absences and the things overlooked in community food make them so'.

The spaces themselves can be socially and culturally coded as white spaces in terms of aesthetics and practices (Guthman 2008b:434). One form of aesthetics and ideals that

[71] This was often more of a cultural identity than a marker of economic status or education level.

[72] While I subscribe to Goodman et al.'s (2014) call for more reflexivity in alternative food movements in relation to issues of inclusion and exclusion, I do not include these sensitive issues in an attempt to criticise Fareshares. Instead, I see them as an important component of an exploration of power, structure (which can include 'racial structuring' (Frankenberg 1993:1)), social practices, and the complexities within these. I also acknowledge that having been a (white, British) member of the collective, I am no less implicated in the reproduction of white space at Fareshares.

Guthman (ibid.) critiques on these grounds is the pared-down, countercultural, DIY practices and looks that Fareshares adheres to, while Slocum (2006:340) reminds us that 'organizational operating styles are shaped by race, sexuality, gender and class'. As places in which white bodies coalesce, she argues (2007:526), they 'become impenetrable to others despite their desire to be otherwise.' As a consequence, adopting anti-racist practices requires scrutiny of the organisation's internal culture and structures (Slocum 2006:340).

Arguably, the foods could also have cultural and social connotations. While the black turtle beans were popular with some of the Latinx[73] and Caribbean customers, many of the goods on offer were associated more closely with the countercultural movement of the 1960s and '70s, which is often described a predominantly white and middle-class movement by both academics and various people who were involved at the time (Knupfer 2013; Hines 1976:43); or with the current trend for 'clean eating', whose figureheads are often young, white women. All this highlighted the ways in which spaces and foods are socially and culturally constructed, and while the associations they carry may make them more inclusive to some, they can also become exclusionary to others.

Community and conviviality

Just as food can be implicated in processes of inclusion and exclusion within Fareshares, it is undoubtedly also embroiled in processes of gentrification in the area around St Hilda's. The proliferation of boutique food and drink businesses set up to serve a certain sort of clientele, often seen as a significant signal that gentrification has arrived (Hubbard 2016), can be found all over Shoreditch, Spitalfields and Bethnal Green today. One particularly contentious 'hipster' spot, less than five minutes' walk from St Hilda's East is the Cereal Killer Café on Brick Lane. This opened in 2014, selling bowls of cereal for three to five pounds. In a TV interview for Channel 4 News, reporter Symeon Brown highlighted some of the objections people felt to such a place by asking if the (white, Irish, bearded) owners thought local residents would be able to afford to eat there. As Brown explained, 'Tower Hamlets is one of the poorest areas in London', a fact that the owner he spoke to was unaware of (Channel 4 2014). Although this process of demographic change and so-called urban renewal has been ongoing since at least the late 1990s (Hubbard 2016), for many current residents the café became a powerful

[73] I choose to use the gender neutral form.

symbol of the changes happening in the area, and the city more widely. In 2015, the café even became the focus of an anti-gentrification protest by the anarchist group Class War, which culminated in paint and cornflakes being thrown at the café, while the protesters shouted 'scum' at those inside (Harvey 2015; Hubbard 2016).

For Lourdes (British Asian), the original coordinator at St Hilda's food co-op, the fact that there were cafés in the area, such as Cereal Killer and The Boundary 'where local people on low incomes could never afford to go' made a resource such as the food co-op all the more important. As she saw it, with the food co-op everyone involved was,

> part of this evolving sort of thing that happens on a Thursday morning and that you can just come and chat to your neighbours, different people who live on the estate and just get to know people really that otherwise you wouldn't talk to because now Shoreditch is just very diverse, you've got quite a high income trendy Shoreditch lot with their beards and then you've got the Bengali community who've been there for a long while… and they don't mix. I think London would like to think it's really multicultural, but those communities do not ever mix.

In essence, Lourdes described a form of multiculturalism in which the Bengalis and the (often white) Shoreditch hipsters, maintained a 'mosaic model of the multicultural city' in which they led different and separate lives despite their proximity (Rhys-Taylor 2013:404; see also Wessendorf 2014). Within the 'micro-public' of the food co-op they did mix though, and as a consequence she felt that this was one of the project's strengths. It was a space of everyday life where 'prosaic negotiations with difference through intimate proximity' took place (Back and Sinha 2016:524; see also Amin 2002 on micro-publics). In her view this created more meaningful forms of conviviality[74] and community,

> …a food co-op where you have different people from different classes and backgrounds working together to set the tables, price up the veggies and then in between chatting about 'what are you doing at the weekend?', or 'what's this?' That is your community development there.

[74] A term attributed to Gilroy in relation to multiculture, used to describe 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere' (Gilroy 2004:xi).

Food was the material and social medium around which these activities were centred.

While I was at St Hilda's, the volunteers themselves were often more reflective of the BAME population of the area and of London more broadly (with some travelling there from other parts of the city) than they were the white, middle-class hipsters of Shoreditch. Nonetheless, through the activities of the food co-op, people from different backgrounds, age groups, and types of mental or physical ability did come together, chat, and get to know each other whether volunteering or shopping. As a consequence this form of conviviality took into account not just ethnic and racial diversity, but a more intersectional range of differences. Inevitably, at times these differences could lead to tensions due to a lack of patience on someone's part, differing methods of communication, lack of knowledge about someone's support needs or, every now and then, inappropriate language or conversations which highlighted difference – an important point to acknowledge as I do not wish to romanticise or overly celebrate these instances of conviviality (Tyler 2017:1891). But in the main these interactions did seem to work.

Maintaining diversity

A celebration of diversity was another key component of St Hilda's East's community-building ideology. Like other community centres started in the late 19th century as part of the British settlement movement, at St Hilda's East's very foundation was an ideal around the benefits of interactions between people of different backgrounds (Scheuer 2011). St Hilda's food co-op was founded on similar principles. As its webpage states, 'it is an enterprise where friendships are built across diverse cultural and social backgrounds' (Jones 2016).

Many of the volunteers I spoke to particularly valued this opportunity to mix and learn from people who were different to themselves (including myself). These interactions were a means of engaging in different forms of affective relations, while also attempting to forge a sense of community, or social belonging (Muehlebach 2012; Malkki 2015).

Working together on the various tasks around the food co-op also created a sense of connection between volunteers, with customers and members of staff within the centre, which could go beyond the fleetingness of small interactions to produce something more trusting, caring and meaningful for those involved (Tyler 2017:1904). Social connectedness, Muehlebach (2012:7) tells us, is all the more important at a time when 'citizenship rights and

duties are being reconfigured in the profoundest of ways' as a consequence of welfare reform.

Zina (from St Lucia), who came to St Hilda's Food Co-op through a combined training and volunteer programme put on in collaboration with a local housing group for its residents, told me, 'you meet different people, different ages, and they all have something to tell you.' This included the customers as well as the volunteers and community centre staff. She mentioned that they sometimes explained how to cook with some of the less familiar vegetables she had come across on the stall. This added to her sense of connection to the food co-op and the centre. For her, the idea of a food co-op was fundamentally tied up with the idea of community, as well as food. During a focus group I held for food co-op volunteers at the centre in 2017 in response to a question I asked about what they felt a food co-op was, she told me,

> To me, when you hear co-op, that's about the community, isn't it? And it's a way of introducing foods that you wouldn't normally see, because coming here that's what happened with me. I got to know about the different organics, the different foods. It's an education in food - that's how I see it.

Vanessa (black British), a full-time mum of three who heard about the food co-op from a friend who was volunteering there already, replied,

> I think it's also got a social aspect to it, where it involves the community. People might get to know other people here, do other things outside of the food co-op as well… you know, socially people get to meet other people, find out about other things as well.

It was the people that 'really made it' for her she told me another time. 'It's a really relaxed, friendly environment.'

Within the current climate of national populism and rising Islamophobia, this sense of conviviality, connection and belonging is arguably all the more important. During my fieldwork, there was a spate of acid attacks in the East End, a proportion of which were directed at Muslim people with Asian heritage. Although many of these were robberies some were said to be motivated by Islamophobia. Either way, these attacks caused heightened fears about hate crime among some Bengali Muslims in the area (Lusher 2017).

Such incidents not only led to a sense of fear and feelings of otherness, but also had the potential to restrict people's mobility. One Bengali woman stopped coming to volunteer at the food co-op, for example, as she was scared to leave her house after news of the rise in acid attacks. Although Jenny, the coordinator, discussed these issues with others within the community centre to see if there were ways to assist this volunteer or any others who were scares to come to the centre, they could not come up with a practical solution.[75]

In relation to diversity, Jenny tried hard to be reflexive about her role as a white, British woman and the perceived authority figure in a project populated by a majority of black and Asian volunteers. She attempted ''a way of seeing' that is attentive to the forms of division and racism' that can still occur within a seemingly diverse environment in which people from different backgrounds were both living and working alongside each other (Back and Sinha 2016:521).

Racism and intersectionality were topics that she had done research into and attempted to reflect upon in terms of her own work practices and how the food co-op operated. In many ways, this was part of the project's performative work. It was a means of enacting within the food co-op what Jenny and the centre wished to see more broadly within society. As a consequence, Jenny tried to enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination of any kind, taking quick and decisive action whenever she witnessed or heard about any form of perceived oppression.

When an older, white, Welsh, male customer who often talked in tangents when he came to shop at the food co-op started speaking about 'coloured people', for example, Jenny quickly picked him up on his language suggesting that this was not an appropriate term and that this kind of language would not be tolerated at the food co-op. As Emma (a black British woman), had just started volunteering that day, Jenny was particularly mindful of ensuring that she felt safe and included at St Hilda's.

If an anti-racist stance 'means that organizations with staff privileged by gender, class and/or whiteness learn how to be allied across difference in their work' (Slocum 2006:340),

[75] Some months after I finished my fieldwork, another incident called 'Punish a Muslim Day', which called on people to launch violent attacks on Muslim people on 3 April 2018 (see Baynes 2018 for details), also stopped many staff members and volunteers from attending the community centre for that day. I heard details of this soon afterwards on a social visit to the centre. It was clear that this had been an upsetting experience.

communicating well with the people engaging with the scheme as volunteers, customers or neighbours, to find out more about their needs and concerns, then Jenny also attempted this. She regularly ran surveys and talked to customers to try to ensure that the produce on sale met the needs of the co-op's customers. Where an item could not be bought from the co-ops' suppliers, such as green bananas and plantain which some members of the Older People's Project requested, or where the quantity she was required to order from the supplier exceeded the amount the co-op could realistically sell before the produce went bad, she regularly took personal orders and then sought out these items herself. This dialogue with customers in relation to inclusion, also led to other changes in stock, such as the supply of cans with ring pull lids, which were easier for the customers from the Older People's Project to open.

Due to the mix of people that used St Hilda's, inevitably there could also be frictions within the centre at times. As I sat and spoke to Rupert, the director, he identified the Older People's Project, from which the food co-op had a loyal customer base, as both a success in some ways and in others a site of tension in relation to multicultural conviviality. The majority of the older people who frequented the lunch club were white, English and working class, often born and raised in the East End. There was also a reasonable number of people from the West Indies, many of whom had been resident in the UK since the Windrush era. There was a noticeable absence of Bengali older people, due to the fact that St Hilda's also ran a day centre for Bengali elders on another site (which moved out of the community centre in 2005 when the council invested in a bespoke centre for eldercare targeted at Bengali people). Around half of the staff working with the older people's project were Bengali, though.

While the community centre's director Rupert, acknowledged that this absence of Bengali elders from the Older People's Project was a shame, he still hailed the project a success due to the inter-racial and ethnic (as well as intergenerational) relationships that it fostered. Much of the time I spent with the older people either accompanying them to the food co-op and helping them with their shopping, or in the lunch club chatting to them or doing surveys for the food co-op or Older People's Project, this diversity was not mentioned. It was, perhaps, treated as commonplace although it was also undoubtedly noticed (Wessendorf 2014). Others embraced diversity, developing strong bonds with the people who looked after them. Doris, a white East Ender in her 90s had a particularly strong connection with one of the staff

members there with Bangladeshi heritage. She often remarked on their difference in age, ethnicity and gender, deriving both interest and amusement from these dissimilarities. As I spoke to others (whether white British or of black Caribbean heritage), just occasionally less than positive comments would come up about the presence of the Muslim or Asian population in the area. Or in Roger's case as detailed in chapter one, the issue of 'coloured' people more generally.

Within the physical configuration of the room that housed the Older People's Project race was also a factor, many of the white, British and Black, West Indian people chose to sit with people from more similar ethnic backgrounds to their own. All this reflected some of the complexities of conviviality. Nuancing binary portrayals of racial dynamics, while also highlighting some of the ways in which 'conviviality' can be entwined with attitudes and practices of care and connection as well as aspects of xenophobia, racism or Islamophobia (Tyler 2017).

The 'right' kind of customers

As we prepared to start opening on a Thursday evening at St Hilda's Food Co-op in August 2016 with the City Bridge funding the centre had won, themes of inclusiveness and community also came up. The changing demographics and the gentrification of the area framed many of the conversations about the new sessions, highlighting the ways in which the boundaries of community can be reinforced or reconsidered. There was much discussion of who the community centre wanted to make use of the new sessions, especially as the funding focused on food poverty and general advice, which often related to issues with state benefits. But as St Hilda's also cared about diversity and inclusion, there was some potential negotiation to be done here to meet the funding targets, the perceived needs of the less affluent members of the local community, while also making everyone feel welcome at the food co-op.

The Boundary Estate was the primary focus of promotional efforts around the evening food co-op, including flyering, which I volunteered to help with. Jenny, Maya, the fundraising and development officer at St Hilda's, and I arrived early one Tuesday morning when the main doors would be unlocked for deliveries. The leaflets we carried were printed in black ink on colourful paper and promoted the new opening, the evening advice service and the

opportunity to receive work training such as food hygiene and first aid certificates, as well as a fun day that St Hilda's would be hosting on the date that the evening food co-op launched. Moving between the blocks of flats, signs in Bengali displayed outside people's front doors and the aromas of south Asian cooking alluded to the continued presence of Bengali residents within the building. Many of the people we saw along the way were familiar with St Hilda's work, and as we added our posters and leaflets to notice boards around the estate, we found plenty of others for projects at the centre.

As the weather was warm and pleasant during the first few weeks of the evening opening, we were able to set up on the pavement outside the centre in order to make the most of the passing footfall, and the stall elicited interest from all sorts of different people. As well as asking where the produce came from and whether we grew it ourselves, a lot of the more affluent (often white) customers were also interested to hear about our financial model, wondering whether the food co-op was a means of raising funds for the community centre. When we told them that it was a not-for-profit, some chose to pay more than the price of the goods in order to support the project and the community centre. This could be as much as £10 for a £3 purchase. Many of the more affluent customers, who lived or worked in the area, were also surprised to see how cheap the goods on sale were, whether organic or not.

One sunny evening, shortly after the evening openings had begun, a white man in his late 20s to early 30s with a beard, striped T-shirt and long hair tied up in a top knot stopped at the stall on his way past. He selected his produce carefully, while didactically commenting on some of the items on the stall. We should be cautious of the non-organic corn-on-the-cob, he told us, as it was likely to be filled with genetically modified organism. The organic corn probably could have done with staying on the stalk for a few more days, he added. Unsolicited, he went on to demonstrate how to tell if an avocado is good or not by pulling out the stalk and checking whether the flesh underneath is green or black. Having filled his basket with organic vegetables, cut-price non-organic avocados, (which were going for 10 pence each as the quality was mixed), and a pack or two of Zaytoun's fairly-traded grains, he made his way towards the till. I could not help but point out the giant courgettes that had grown to the size of marrows in a box next to the till to see how he would value these. 'They're gleaned' I told him (i.e. gathered from farms that cannot sell them to their usual customers), and he enthusiastically confirmed that he would definitely have one of those. He was going to

spiralise it, he told us.[76] After he had ridden away on his bicycle, Mary, another evening volunteer, wryly commented that he was the 'epitome of a hipster'.

I cannot deny that by pointing the courgettes out to him I was being a little mischievous as an ethnographer as I wanted to see how this 'hipster' would perceive their value. His positive response to the courgettes, confirmed my suspicions. Shopping choices, and indeed food itself, can say much about identities, as the discussion of exclusion at Fareshares suggests. In this case of the 'hipster' customer, he marked aspects of his values and status out through consumption of 'ethical' goods (Littler 2011 on ethical consumption; see also Bourdieu 2010 on distinction; Appadurai 1981; Clark 2004; Mintz and Du Bois 2002 on food and identity). Doing so can also be a means of expressing resistance to the 'dominant lifestyle norms and mainstream consumer sensibilities' in order to reinforce a more alternative identity which is popularly described as 'hipster' (Cronin, McCarthy, and Collins 2014:3). Within public understandings and academic literature, the kind of consumption choices he was making, which privileged alternative food networks, such as locally produced organic goods sourced directly from the farmer or gleaned courgettes, are typically associated with the middle classes and often whiteness, however inadvertently (Guthman 2008b; Slocum 2007; Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014; Kneafsey et al. 2008; Grasseni 2013; Som Castellano 2015b). This, again, highlights the ways in which food can be socially constructed.

In those early weeks of the new evening opening, we regularly counted customer numbers, even turning it into a guessing game at 8pm as we waited for the till to print out a 'Z' reading which showed takings and sales numbers for the shift. There was also discussion between Jenny and Rupert about whether we were getting enough of the 'right kind' of customers – i.e. less affluent. We were certainly getting customers who were seen as part of the target audience, such as people living on the estate, using the advice service or just appearing less well-heeled, and some of our morning customers had even started coming twice a day. But we were also getting a higher proportion of organic sales and many of the evening customers did appear to be either more affluent or more 'hipster'. [77]

[76] This is a technique whereby vegetables are cut into thin ribbons which are often eaten raw in the place of carbohydrates such as pasta or noodles. Spiralising has been fashionable in the last few years, especially amongst health conscious cooks (see Best 2016 for more details).

[77] Although high in cultural capital, this is a group which is often associated with creative, entrepreneurial or freelance jobs meaning hipsters' work lives and finances can be more precarious (Hubbard 2016).

In terms of the project's funding and remit, these issues had to be considered carefully – were there any potential consequences of this different demographic to the project and its participants? What should be counted as a success in terms of customers and their numbers? Jenny thought about these issues a lot and we discussed them on more than one occasion. Ultimately, she concluded, all customers were good customers as the more we sold, the lower we could make the mark-up because the delivery costs would remain the same. Despite the associations the organic foods might have with more affluent shoppers, she felt strongly about giving people the choice and as she put it, 'not assuming how people are going to use what, I recognise, are very limited budgets'. As she explained 'I don't think it's our role to assume how those budgets might be used'.

For many of the volunteers, irrespective of race, ethnicity or income, being involved with the food co-op was an opportunity to experiment, trying out new fruits and vegetables, including incorporating more organics into their diets. The £3.60 lunch allowance, which many chose to spend on fruit and veg, no doubt made these experiments less financially risky. Equally, while many of the Bengali families who regularly shopped at the food co-op focussed on price and quality, some always bought organic goods as they felt that these were healthier. With the members of the Older People's Project, most focussed on the cheaper non-organic goods, at times feeling suspicious of the organics and why they were generally more expensive. Some, who were more physically capable of cooking and interested in different kinds of food, mixed and matched between the organics and non-organics though, based on what they liked the look of.

Shopping is a contradictory process, at times pragmatic, at others ethical or deeply personal (Miller 2001). And while the tastes of the so-call hipster customer who I described seemed to correlate with his appearance (along with many of the other white, middle-class-presenting evening customers, who favoured the organics) other people's identities and shopping preferences added nuance to these assumptions. As both an identity marker and a social medium around which both co-op's activities centred, the food on sale could act as a means of both inclusion and exclusion, highlighting some of the tensions within each area relating to race, ethnicity, place and community as well as some of the ways in which St Hilda's and Fareshares tried to address these inequalities – however successfully, or not. In essence,

'collectivity and exclusion are two sides of the same coin' and in order to understand either, it is necessary to look at both in all their contradictions (Creed 2006:4).

Conclusions

During my fieldwork, I often spent my Thursday lunchbreak in Arnold Circus with Jenny, the food co-op coordinator at St Hilda's. This location atop the ruins of the Old Nichol slum made both of us reflect on the history of the community centre, the area and of the Boundary Estate.[78] When the fate of the Nichol slum-dwellers came up, this often prompted us to reflect on the ways in which the spaces around St Hilda's have been structured and restructured, contested and resettled time and again, reframing the newness of phenomena such as 'gentrification' (a process whereby a typically poorer area of a city changes into a more affluent one due to the arrival of new, richer residents)[79] and the ways in which patterns of urban renewal (whether on the grounds of welfare, its reform or of profit) and the displacement this causes have often been repeated.

Many scholars have noted the significance of physical and social space in the analysis of power, its enactment and contestation (see for example De Certeau 2011; Low 2011; Lefebvre 1991; Scott 1999; Harvey 2000). The city, in particular, is a rich site in which to observe how inequalities are 'imposed through spatial and governmental control of the environment' and the discourses that surround and mystify their 'material effects' (Low, 2011: 403). These forms of inequality were evident in the displacement of the residents of the Old Nichol slum when this was cleared to make way for the Boundary Estate (as discussed in chapter two). We also see these processes at work in the regeneration projects around Elephant and Castle. The story of the Bengali squatters in the East End highlighted the ways in which this group fought for their rights to housing welfare as British citizens in the 1970s (a status which has always been more contingent for people from minority ethnic backgrounds as I discussed in chapter two). Since then, much has changed in terms of housing. Right to buy had significant consequences on access and rights to social housing as part of welfare reform. This has been followed in areas such as Elephant and Castle by further displacements due to regeneration work, or fragmentation within an area due to the disconnections, hierarchies, and, at times,

[78] Jenny also shared various documentary and book recommendations about local history with me.
[79] Even if the term itself was not coined by Ruth Glass until the 1960s (Slater 2011:1192).

antagonism that can exist between different kinds of residents (some owners, others renters or council tenants) (Lees and Ferreri 2016).

London itself has always had significant connections to the development of capitalism, empire and more recent forms of globalisation. The wealth that has accrued in the City as a consequence of these trajectories has always been uneven, however. What is more, the accrual of capital by some actually *produces* both poverty and exclusion for others (Massey 2005:157). As highlighted here in relation to housing, for example, while the development of capital investment in property in London may bolster the City, and by extension the national economy, it also directly impacts on livelihoods, living conditions and infrastructures for others within areas such as Elephant and Castle and Shoreditch. As Eade tells us,

> [t]he contemporary global city's social and economic inequalities are shaped by the uneven flows of capital, information, services, and different types of people across national borders. At the same time London's social and economic divisions still bear the traces of empire… struggles around racial and ethnic differences engage with a colonial heritage of beliefs and practices concerning insiders and outsiders. (2001:16)

The stories of St Hilda's and the Pullens Estate, the East End and Elephant and Castle are all productive to think with today in relation to the right to space and housing and the ways in which inequality can be configured along spatial lines.

As Adina and Colomba's discussion of the changes around the Pullens Estate since the 1980s highlight, community can also be tied to feelings of nostalgia. This Pickering and Keightley (2006:920) point out, is a form of 'longing for what is lacking in a changed present… a yearning for what is now unattainable'. Adina and Colomba's memory of sharing spaces, places and foods is experienced by both with this nostalgic sense of loss and yearning in the face of structural and societal change. As Back (2009:203) argues, nostalgic visions of community can also have moralising qualities enacted as a means of judging others. He suggests, '[c]ommunity talk can lament a world that has passed and/or invoke the possibility of a new kind of world just on the horizon.' Such discourses have arguably become further heightened within the context of Brexit and rising national populism.

Social and structural changes can also draw people towards ideals of community. This can be a means of either reaching out towards more diverse communities (however unsuccessfully), in the case of Fareshares, or fostering more supportive and respectful forms of connection, through Jenny's attempts at anti-racist practices. 'Once an imperial centre, London is now a key junction or crossroads within the circuit of global neoliberal capitalism,' Back and Sinha suggest, 'an exemplar of what Doreen Massey calls the 'throwntogetherness' of urban life' (2016:517). This relates to the ways in which diverse entities (different kinds of people, different foods and temporalities) can gather together in relation to 'foster a particular 'here and now'' within a specific space (Anderson 2008:230). It is, therefore, inevitable that these attempts at community building and conviviality can cause their challenges. 'Places and people are defined not by singularity and coherence but by multiplicity and ambiguity' (Eade 2001:6). Clearly people's practices can also be contradictory, attesting to the 'the entanglement, co-existence and production of attitudes of racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia with neighbourly, routine and respectable expressions of interethnic conviviality' (Tyler 2017:1904) present at St Hilda's.

Chapter five – Structures of care, practices of politics

Induction

On my first visit to St Hilda's I met Jenny to find out more about the project, its practices and aims, and to discuss whether I would be able to volunteer with them. We sat in the computer room at the centre as Jenny would be facilitating an online food hygiene training course for some of the food co-op's volunteers after our meeting. When we were done, Kim, the volunteer coordinator, gave me a full tour of the building, talking me through the different projects they hosted there before sending me home with a lengthy form to fill in with details ranging from age and ethnicity to work status, qualifications, and referee contacts. All this felt welcoming and organised. Since I joined, the induction has also been enhanced with opportunities to practice on the till and learn the basic systems of the food co-op, before being thrown into a busy Thursday session.

Volunteers were efficiently inducted, trained, and given a clear point of contact for any support needs they might have. Volunteer attendance was taken weekly, and at regular intervals throughout my time there we filled out volunteer surveys, asking about why we came to volunteer, what difference volunteering had made to us, and if the experience had impacted on our food practices. It also asked for feedback and suggestions. All this created an environment in which St Hilda's staff could support the volunteers to the best of their ability and facilitate their understanding of volunteers' interests and needs. These surveys also fed into trustee and managerial meetings at the centre, the annual report for St Hilda's, and monitoring reports for project funders. These were all key elements of the organisational culture of the community centre, which speak to the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of the third sector discussed in chapter one. This is a world in which forms of governance are distilled down to the administrative tasks of measuring 'quality, efficiency' and 'organizational *effectiveness*' (Shore and Wright 2015:422), as means of assessing how best to support the local community, the volunteers and maintain a competitive edge in terms of fundability. And, given the changes to the funding of community food initiatives that have occurred in recent years, funding certainly was becoming more competitive.

Induction at Fareshares was a very different matter.[80] After a prospective volunteer had got in touch, they would be contacted by someone from the group of volunteers who dealt with volunteer enquiries. This group would assign them to a shift based on what was needed at Fareshares and what the new volunteer was able to do. Someone from the new volunteer group would then let the shift the volunteer was going to join know, at which point it was over to the shift team. What happened next was very much dependent on who a new volunteer worked with. While there had been various plans to put together shift guides for each of the different weekly activities, ranging from unpacking, to ordering or serving customers, only a few had actually been written, and even if a shift did have one, others on the shift might not necessarily know, or remember, to share it. Instead, what a volunteer got to know about how things worked, tended to depend on who else was on the shift, how connected they were to the collective as a whole and, often, how long they had been involved. New volunteers could quickly be thrown in at the deep end to work the shift alone if a shift was short of people, even though everyone acknowledged that this was not an ideal scenario. When I spoke to Nuala, who had been volunteering for about six months at that point, for example, she said that this was one of the things she had found hardest about joining Fareshares. She enjoyed working with her other shiftmates, but when she had to work alone she did not feel like she had all the information, know where to look for it, or who to contact if she had questions as she did not have anyone's number. This is not an uncommon experience in collective organising where the pedagogical logic can include an element of finding out for yourself. In these situations people can feel 'left alone with the burden of responsibilities weighting on their shoulders' (Müller 1991:150).

These practices and the notion of 'spontaneous order' that they promote are all part of an anti-authoritarian or anarchist ethos (Ward 2008:39), which sits in opposition to the kind of audit culture that third sector organisations such as St Hilda's are beholden to. Fareshares

[80] I should acknowledge that before re-joining, I was invited to one of Fareshares' monthly meetings, which was held on a Sunday afternoon. This was a chance to tell the collective about my project, seek their consent to my return and discuss any conditions they might have. The only condition they requested was the blanket usage of pseudonyms in my work unless I had specific consent from a member to use their name. This was included in the meeting's minutes meaning anyone who was not in attendance also got to hear about what I was doing, and feedback if they had any concerns or conditions. This aspect of my reintroduction seemed to run smoothly and efficiently. As this was a weekend meeting, some members also prepared food, so we all had a chance to eat and socialise together. In keeping with the food co-ops' policies in terms of stock, I brought vegan, sugar-free cocoa, date and almond balls, which seemed to go down well.

pointedly avoided external funding, except on rare occasions if the money came from an organisation whose politics and ethos sufficiently aligned with that of Fareshares. In so doing, the collective avoided being drawn into the bureaucratic structures of such an arrangement, or the forms of subordination that can come with rational-legal authority (Weber 1978 [1922]) that came with them. Instead, members were only accountable to each other through the loose communication methods of the members' email list, the paper daybook (which lived under the counter in the co-op), and the monthly meetings. Within these less formal arrangements it was up to each individual how much they chose to engage.

As these experiences highlight, St Hilda's East and Fareshares represent very different ideologies, structures and forms of sociality – one based on ideals of community, care, employability and more institutionalised forms of volunteering, the other on 'alternative modes of relationality and on visions of laterality and egalitarianism' (Rozakou 2016:80), with less formalised structures or bureaucracies. As a consequence, each has a different relationship to the meaning and value of volunteering, community and hierarchy, and to the role these play in their visions of politics, aid and care. Each reveals different experiences of, and responses to, the changing structures of economy and society in Britain today, and to the conditions of work. In this chapter, I start by looking at the ways in which Fareshares attempts to enact anarchist forms of relationality, which work performatively to reconfigure social relationships, working environments and models of exchange within the food co-op. In doing so, they attempt to create a safe and caring space for shoppers and collective members. Horizontality always comes with its challenges, however, as I highlight through some of the forms of authority and uncomfortable power dynamics that have formed over the years as a consequence of tensions between keeping the project going, managing limited time and conflicting values around spontaneous order, consensus decision-making and more capitalist logics of efficiency and rationality. I then turn to St Hilda's and the ways in which co-operative values sit within a charitable organisation with an ethos of support and care provision, and the ways in which these competing ideals play out in the coordinator Jenny's values and practices. Finally, I turn to the changing nature of work and volunteerism and the ways in which Jenny attempts to respond to this more punitive climate through practices of care within the food co-op.

Practices of politics

Within the ethos of an autonomous, DIY-style space such as Fareshares, it is up to the individuals involved to collectively decide how things should be done. As Müller notes, such groups 'do not have a formal head, so any member can assume the role of de facto decision-maker' as and when needed (1991:120). This works in the anarchist spirit of spontaneous order, whereby a group of people with a common need will 'by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation – this order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of externally imposed authority could provide' (Ward 2008:39). Here, there is an emphasis on the political power of non-hierarchical organising rather than modernist rationalities of efficiency. These methods, therefore, not only contribute to the collective's performative power, but also to the potential 'chaos of collective organisation' (Müller 1991:120).

Not always knowing who else they could ask, and often having a fierce sense of autonomy and independence, volunteers at Fareshares often developed their own ideas and systems for running a shift. These were based on what they may have seen from other members, their own life and work experiences, and the clues they found around the shop about how things were meant to be done – such as the list of instructions on the daily takings and cashing up sheets, which were one of food co-op's concessions to more rational-legal systems.

Here my own experience acts as a good illustration of the destabilising feelings this less structured induction can foster, as well as the feelings of autonomy that may follow. After re-joining the collective in November 2015, by my third Thursday evening, I was left to run the 6-8pm shift alone as the other Thursday 'shifties' were unavailable. Although I had been shown some of the basics about shutting up and cashing up, there was still plenty to figure out as I went along. This was an anxiety-inducing experience as Thursday had the longest opening hours of the week, with many different people taking money and noting down sales throughout the day as they chatted to the customers and each other. By the time the money was cashed up, the numbers were often different to what might be expected – at times substantially so. Doing the Thursday evening alone was also a point at which I started to feel more ownership of the shift and the space though, as I was the only one there to make decisions. Not long afterwards, as other new volunteers joined, I was the one showing them how the shift ran.

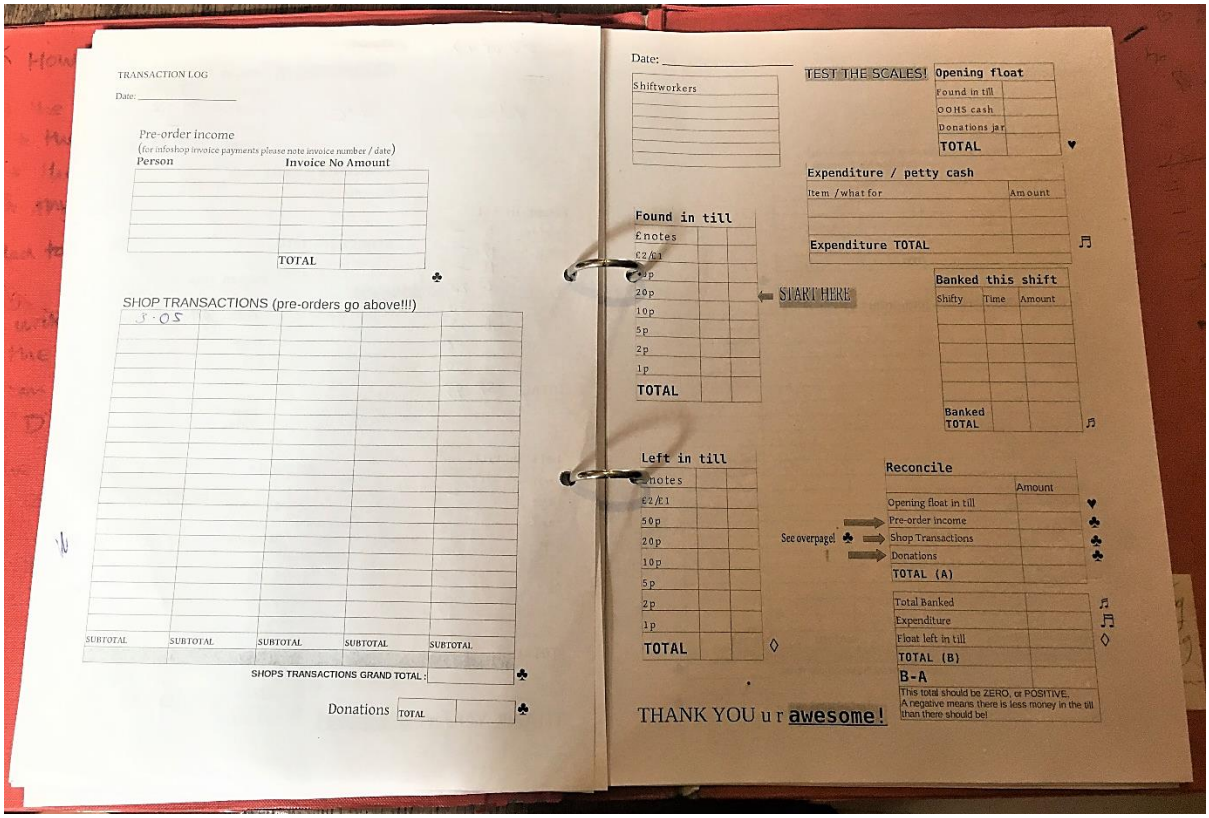


Figure 31 Fareshares cashing up sheets. Celia Plender, 2017.

Although some systems did exist, some were adhered to more closely than others. While everyone filled out the cashing up sheets, for example, few put their name on the weekly rota as each group of volunteers was in charge of maintaining the needs of their own shifts, and tended to communicate with each independently in order to ensure each shift was covered. This could make things a little confusing for the volunteers dealing with new volunteer enquiries at times, in terms of who to tell that someone new would be shadowing a shift.

Many of Fareshares' members also felt uncomfortable with too many rules, policies or other types of formal administrative structure. In a project with anarchist roots, these could have the oppressive, hierarchical feel of Weber's Iron Cage (2012 [1905]). The language of bureaucracy could also be seen to have performative power – whereby their discourses produced the phenomena that they regulated and constrained (Butler 2011). While discussing amendments to the new members 'policy', for example, the issue of naming came up, and there was almost as much discomfort with the term 'policy' (which according to Graeber 'assumes a state or governing apparatus which imposes its will on others' (2004:9)) as there was with the proposed guidelines for when someone would become an 'official' member of the co-op.

These guidelines were devised by a working group (including myself), following a suggestion at a meeting that a new process might be needed. This was in order to ensure a good supply of volunteers, enough support for non-shift jobs such as finances and ordering and a good flow of information within the food co-op via better meeting attendance. This was, in part, a response to the fact that the same people tended to go to meetings and therefore signed up to more jobs out of a sense of responsibility. This not only put an unequal weight of responsibility on their shoulders, but also had the potential to produce an imbalance in power as those with more jobs may also end up with more permanent forms of authority than those aspired to in a non-hierarchical organisation in which,

> Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination. (Bakunin 1871)

The other form of authority is more hierarchical and more alienating, with decisions and actions imposed on others, either by right or by coercion (Weber 1978 [1922]). From an anarchist, or anti-authoritarian perspective, such 'a fixed, constant and universal authority' should never be recognised as legitimate (Bakunin 1871).

The proposed membership 'policy' or guidelines were seen to be overly prescriptive and inflexible to the needs of potential members and the kinds of contributions they might be able to make. In effect, they had the potential to create disenchantment through the rigidity of rationalisation (Weber 2012 [1905]), as well as excluding some members. All these rejections of policies, rules and rigid structures attempted to contravene the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of volunteerism, work and, by extension, society (Rozakou 2016:82; Shore and Wright 2015 on society as an audit culture).

Fareshares is as much an ideological project as a space where food is sold, and much of the work that goes on relates to the social structures and bonds that the group attempts to build and reproduce. Amongst the more anarchist members that I spoke to, there was a clear connection between the use of non-hierarchical organising, decisions by consensus and a do-it-yourself mentality and the idea of counterpower. This was a means of practically critiquing aspects of contemporary society through the creation of new structures and associations

(Shepard and Burghardt 2015:2; Graeber 2004:24)) in terms of work, economic exchange and forms of sociality. Maria, for example, a former member of Fareshares, believed that

> …all these little spaces, whether they're social spaces or food co-ops, or all these little dynamics that go on, that is actually the revolution. The revolution is not overturning the government. The revolution is not the big coup. The revolution is fundamentally changing the way people interact on a small day-to-day level and doing that all over the place, and that's ongoing.

Anarchism has always been difficult to define. 'It is amorphous and full of paradoxes and contradictions' (Miller 1984:2). It has never had one key theorist (perhaps appropriately), and there are many different ways to practice it, from individualist to revolutionary to more collectively orientated – as Maria's and Fareshares' version is. At the core of anarchism, though, whether as practice or ideology, is the notion of a society without a ruler or any other form of top-down, centralised authority. The day-to-day interactions that Maria referred to, therefore, became a pedagogical tool that helped to foster new forms of egalitarian relationships while opening people's imaginations to the idea of a state- and leader-less society. By 'entering into other relationships, by behaving differently to one another' (Landauer 1910:165), anarchism offers 'affirming alternative relationships to those of state' or 'intertwined hierarchical relationships' such as capitalism or (in the case of Fareshares) heteronormativity, as I discuss further below (Heckert 2011:189).

On these grounds, Heckert argues that anarchism is 'an ethics of relationships', which involve connecting 'directly, intersubjectively and warmly' (Heckert 2011:187), while acknowledging that 'we will never cease creating new relations among ourselves' (Proudhon 1930 in Heckert 2011). And these ethics, bound to an ethos of care, apply to every kind of relationship – '[e]cological and social, embodied and symbolic, interpersonal and interspecies, of class and race and gender and nation' (Heckert 2011:186). All of which is reminiscent of founder-member Martin Oddsocks' original logics for starting the food co-op, which would promote 'fairness for human-animals as much as any other animals', as well as enacting more environmentally-friendly consumption practices.

When I spoke to Kellan (pronouns K and K's)[81] about Fareshares' anarchist roots, and the changing composition of the people who volunteered there, K's sentiments were similar to Maria's. K acknowledged that many within the collective today would not necessarily identify themselves as anarchists, but that 'it is a place where people try to create something different. Outside of the state/capital structures. So to me I am working in an anarchist project.' K explained.

Between them, Maria and Kellan identified two key elements at the heart of Fareshares' political project: non-hierarchical organising and anti-capitalism. The two are clearly not unconnected. Operating as a non-profit space encouraged more mutual and convivial, rather than transactional, forms of consumption, which were important elements of its anti-capitalist practices. So too, was the rejection of the forms of rationalisation and bureaucratisation associated with capitalist modernity, however challenging that may be as a co-operative enclave inside a capitalist society (Weber 1978 [1922]).

As Kellan saw it, Fareshares consisted of two communities. One was made up of the volunteer-members who kept the space going, the other of a network of all those involved with the food co-op as volunteers, shoppers and suppliers. Kellan saw the ways in which these two groups came together as a valuable part of the project's performative work and a way of bringing new social and financial relationships and structures into being through practice and discourse. K particularly enjoyed the idea of a shopping space which was not overtly consumerist, where shoppers would often answer each other's questions, give each other tips on diets, ingredients and cooking, or strike up conversations.

According to Kellan, 'it's about trying to create spaces and places and relationships which are breaking and disrupting those state/capital mechanisms.' Along with the co-op's non-profit model combined with voluntary association, a rejection of wage labour,[82] and the forms of non-hierarchical organising apparent amongst its members, one of the ways in which this was done was through the promotion of more sociable and less consumerist shopping experiences. K went on to tell me that Fareshares was a community that disrupted the idea that everyone within society is a consumer and, therefore, the culture of consumption itself.

[81] Kellan is gender non-binary and uses K and K's rather than more common gender neutral pronouns such as 'they' and 'their'.
[82] As such it was seen as an unalienated form of labour.

No one within the collective would try to make shoppers buy more than they wanted, but volunteers might try to have a chat.

Nuala agreed, suggesting that when people came through the door at Fareshares, they tended to slow down. They did not treat the volunteers as shop assistants and they knew they needed to pull their weight by cleaning up after themselves as they selected and weighed out their goods. Even if they did not pick up on the co-op's 'alternativeness' the first time they visited, by the second time, she observed, they would have started to behave in line with the food co-op's ethos. Kellan felt that these alternatives forms of sociality were all the more significant in an era when people did not even have to speak to a shop assistant when they bought from a supermarket, thanks to automated self-service check-out systems (which K tried to avoid using).

Every shop shift at Fareshares had a slightly different feel to it. While Saturdays tended to attract shoppers who appeared to have comfortable enough incomes to buy a lot of their weekly groceries at Fareshares, Thursday and Friday evenings were often less conventional, and more sociable. If the Saturday shoppers were there to get their groceries and get home to families, friends and weekend activities, some of the Thursday and Friday evening regulars might stay for the whole evening, drifting between the food co-op, the Infoshop and the Bikespace before heading home with some carefully chosen purchases. Although the colourful chairs that used to be in the middle of the shop in the early days declaring the space's sociality were long gone by the time I arrived at Fareshares, there was still a wooden chair in the space where shoppers could sit, relax and chat with volunteers and other shoppers – some that they already knew and others not. Many also perched on the stepping stools used for reaching higher shelves.

On a Thursday and Friday evening there was often more of an alternative crowd, made up of (predominantly white) lefties, hippies and conspiracy theorists, and the conversations that took place could be about anything from activism to the veracity of the moon landings or the values of 'native American' wisdom. While I did not hear it myself, other members told me that they had also heard plenty of talk of lizard people. A classic conspiracy theory in which many of the rich and powerful people on planet earth (including the British Royal family and the American political dynasty the Bushes) are, in fact, shapeshifting reptilian aliens who are

ruling the planet. Dietary practices were another popular topic on all of the shifts, with the 'alkaline diet', in particular, much discussed during my time there.[83]

Oddballs, non-conformists and vegans

Although unwaged, the structures and practices of Fareshares most closely resemble those of a workers' co-op. It is the volunteer-members who make the decisions, choose the stock and worry about the food co-op's survival (and here the two most common concerns while I was a member were volunteer numbers and finances). As a consequence, at its very core are questions about the structures of society, community and of work. It is an environment in which '[t]he "traditional" separation between administrators, planners, and coordinators on the one hand and executors on the other must be replaced by "the collective," which both takes the decisions and executes them' (Müller 1991:100). As Nash and Hopkins (1976:10) suggest, the 'basic meaning of the word co-operative 'refers to the organization of work; in principle it refers to an organizational structure in which all are equally workers and managers, and so exploitation is absent.'

Within this alternative structure of work, there were attempts to create a more respectful and caring environment. In opposition to a capitalist work arrangement in which '*social* relationships were based on exploitation, regularization, alienation, and commodification', these relationships should be more 'empathetic', 'cooperative' and 'meaningful' (Heller 1999:93 emphasis original).

As Zoe explained,

> The bookshop is very anarchist, we're at the kind of soft, hippy side of that, but because of that people believe in community, believe in inclusiveness… maybe they don't always know how to do it necessarily, but they have this initial openness and wanting to commit to treating people with respect.

Zoe went on to highlight the ways in which collective members could be mindful of each other's 'moods and temporary or permanent frailties', like attempting to check in with other members that people knew were struggling. She noted that she had never been in a working

[83] This is based on the theory that you can change the pH of your body through the foods that you eat. The theory has not been substantiated scientifically (Torrens 2018).

environment where such issues were spoken about 'so matter-of-factly, without stigmatising or being scared of not knowing how to help.' Through these more affective and equal relationships, in principle, people could feel more connected to their fellow co-operative members and more satisfied by the work of running the co-op, therefore fostering a less alienating environment (Marx and Engels 2011 [1844]). Within the Wednesday afternoon shift, Ed, my shiftmate, and I attempted to foster an atmosphere of care and support for each other, reflective of our personalities and ideals around mutual aid, co-operation and care; this was often how the relations of care that Zoe referred to worked.

Within the wider project, though, care could be variable in my experience. Where the act of caring for others was a core aspect of St Hilda's activities, as I will discuss below, at Fareshares it could feel like more of a choice, this could be both empowering , and also alienating if care was provided less equally.

Some people's needs and vulnerabilities were more visible than others depending on their personalities and, perhaps, status within the collective. When I or other members recounted issues they were dealing with in other co-op contexts (mailing list, meetings or informal conversations), however, the response could range from concern or solidarity to little reaction at all. How well someone knew the member in question and how connected they felt to them undoubtedly played a part; as did the tension that existed between the instrumental concern for getting things done, complex rationalities brought in from other experiences of work around time and efficiency (Weber 2012 [1905]), and the emotional labour (Hochschild 2003) involved in both keeping the project running and maintaining more affective relations. How much time and energy different volunteers felt they had for the project and its different elements and organisational logics, along with their own values and personalities, were also significant.

For some members of the collective, the notion of safe space was also very important to their ideal of the kind of workplace, non-business and community that Fareshares was attempting to create; this was a space in which alternativeness and an acceptance of difference were promoted. 'I suppose we are a community in a way,' Kellan, told me, 'full of oddballs, non-conformists and vegans.' K continued,

> I think we enable a safe space for all those people that modern consumer society doesn't allow themselves to be… It's a safe space for people who don't conform to not conform.

Kellan valued this from both a personal and political perspective as a queer, non-binary punk. Nuala and Lisa also appreciated the queer-friendly nature of the space, although Nuala speculated that this could potentially be dependent on who was actually running each shift, therefore reflecting shift workers' individual values rather than necessarily being consistent throughout the co-op and its shifts. She was unsure, though, as she was still getting to know others within the collective.

As Boni (2018:395) defines it, safe space is a 'comfortable, respectful space that allows freedom of expression of opinions and practices. It relates to a physical place, which people treat as *theirs* and to metaphorical space constructed through social relations'. Like anarchist practices, it is also processual, requiring much 'relational work which is put into making and preserving' it (ibid.).

This safe space not only attempted to counterpose the kind of consumer culture that Kellan referred to, but also the forms of disenfranchisement born of neoliberal capitalism and the traditionalism of rising right-wing populism. As Barrett (2010) points out, however, what may feel safe for some, may not feel safe for others – an issue that the discussion of whiteness at Fareshares in chapter four highlighted. Here, too, structure (or structurelessness) may have been an issue.

Fareshares' whiteness was borne out in some of the stories that members told me. Various people mentioned that when people of colour had entered the project, they had not always stayed that long. While some members were unsure about what it was about Fareshares that did not feel accessible to people of colour, others recounted how volunteers of colour had felt 'side-lined' or 'dismissed'. According to Rachel (a white, British woman), these issues had not often been raised with the collective though. Throughout my time at Fareshares, although these issues have come up at various moments, the collective has lacked the strong advocates of anti-racism and a more diverse environment that would be necessary to make proactive, rather than reactive, steps towards change which practitioners such as Slocum advocate (as detailed in the previous chapter in relation to Jenny's practices) (2006; 2007).

Structure and structurelessness

> Everywhere you go, I think, but particularly co-ops, people tend to bring in their assumptions and their ways of working from their other experiences whether it's their workplace or their families and all that kind of stuff. And everybody's experience is quite various and different and so that sort of thing, of not thinking there's going to be someone up there that you need to ask, that you might have to sort stuff out between you is, you know, quite a deep thing to work out I think. (Ed, Fareshares)

Through these forms of sociality and attempts at non-hierarchical organising, Fareshares' members try to 'embed autonomy and democracy in their organizational practices' (Smith 2008 in Land and King 2014:928). While this model might promise 'a more democratic form of organization, based on free association and mutual aid… [which]… mitigates some of the dysfunctions of formal authority and hierarchy' (Land and King 2014:927), achieving it is not always so straightforward.

Scholars of social movements have often acknowledged the potential pitfalls involved in participatory democracy and the ideal of anti-authoritarian organising, noting the problems that can arise due to the values, societal norms (Kadir 2016) and past experiences (Polletta 2012) that participants bring with them to their activist spaces. These experiences of hierarchy and structures can range from work to political organising, family structures[84] or capitalist paradigms of rationalism and efficiency (Weber 2012 [1905]) to name a few. All these factors, combined with personal and collective ideologies, and the instrumental concerns of keeping the project running, work to shape the social practices and rationality of a food co-op and its members. Often, there can also be 'one or two members who stand out clearly from the rest' due to strong levels of motivation, which lead them to impose 'themselves on others by their determination to realize their ideals and to take action where others were hesitating' (Müller 1991:115). This, again, has the potential to create more coercive forms of authority or alienating working relations.

When I first started working with Fareshares in 2013, the co-op was still reeling from the departure of a co-op member who had acquired the role of unofficial leader (Hannah). During

[84] Proudhon, for example, argues that the family is a common mechanism through which people are trained into the logic of accepting authority and a system of government as the natural order (in Western contexts), as the family also works hierarchically (1851).

that period of preliminary fieldwork, Hannah was mentioned in every interview I conducted.[85] The rawness of her recent departure and the sense of relief that she had finally gone were palpable in those conversations. Hannah had been at Fareshares for well over a decade, and along with a couple of other key members, she had also helped to reopen Fareshares after a period of closure in the late 1990s, which was brought on by a mixture of more stringent food hygiene checks by the local authority[86] and financial/organisational issues. This meant that she helped to create many new processes at Fareshares, and took on various responsibilities. As such, she was instrumental in shaping Fareshares' discourses as well as the norms and forms of knowledge of which they were constituted (Foucault 2002:53; Rose 2012:52). This established her with the authority that came of knowing the rules and having been around the longest. For several years she was also seen as someone efficient who got things done. As one member told me, Hannah 'is a very intelligent person and she was able to control everything. She had a mind for everything. I used to admire her because she was really capable.' As a consequence, people were prepared to accept her role as a charismatic leader until the balance of power had tipped too far (Weber 1978 [1922]).[87]

As Kate explained, by 2011, they had reached a point where there were some seriously 'entrenched dynamics around ownership, so people felt disempowered.' After considering strike action, and attempting mediation, they made the exceptional decision to take a majority vote (rather than work by consensus) on whether to ask Hannah to leave. Of the 16 members who voted, 14 agreed to this action, while two abstained. A letter was then sent to Hannah asking her to step back from the co-op.

Through the overthrow and exclusion of their unofficial leader, Fareshares was able to reinstitute and reinforce values of non-hierarchical organising; and while much of the

[85] Although not by name. Here, I also use a pseudonym for Hannah and for everyone else discussing the issues with Hannah and Dave due to their sensitive nature.

[86] Food hygiene regulation became significantly more stringent during the 1990s and 2000s with substantial input from the EU. The bureaucracies involved clearly did not sit comfortably with the collective's values. This was an area of governance to which they were obliged to conform, however, in order to continue their activities.

[87] Although I did not have a chance to discuss these events with Hannah, in other ethnographic accounts, scholars have noted that unofficial leaders can often feel 'pushed into the role by the pressure of circumstance' rather than deliberately attempting to seize authority. Once there, it is not always easy to step down from it (Müller 1991:116).

imbalance of power within the co-op was attributed to Hannah,[88] this situation also offered the collective an opportunity to reflect on its internal workings, and how best to stop such situations reoccurring. As Francesca reflected,

> We like to be really flat and we like to not have hierarchies and too much bureaucracy, but that's when you understand the value of bureaucracy in a way. It takes away the personal and in cases like that, that's what you need. It's not between you and me, it's these are the rules… So, I think that's when as a group we really understand the value of that.

In this situation, the hierarchy of bureaucracy clearly felt more acceptable than the authority of an unappointed leader.

It was these 'rules' in the form of disciplinary and grievance procedures that the collective drew upon when it was discovered a couple of years later that verbally abusive behaviour had been taking place on one of the shifts at Fareshares. Here, the combination of atomised working arrangements and DIY organising may well have contributed to the abusive situation. Dave[89] (the perpetrator) was well established on the shift where it took place. This meant he was responsible for producing the discourses around how the shift operated. In doing so, he was also able to control these discourses to some extent (Foucault 2002:53). It was up to him how much he shared about the processes that were in place and the logics behind them with new members who joined. While this gave him authority and a strong sense of ownership on his shift, it also meant that the other, newer members did not necessarily know the processes for running the shift, what the collective's stance was in terms of acceptable behaviour, or who to turn to if they wanted to discuss what was happening with Dave.

When reflecting on all that had happened with Dave, Finn told me,

> At that time there were quite a few of us that had been through the whole process and we discovered that people had been bullied we were appalled because we'd been through this huge process of throwing somebody out of the project and trying to

[88] This is not uncommon in social groups attempting to work by egalitarian structures as a means of avoiding the tensions and contradictions that could come with attempts to reintegrate these de-facto leaders into the group as an equal (Barth 1965; Müller 1991).
[89] Also not his real name.

> create a new, fairer, safer environment and it turned out that two people were actually being bullied… That's not what you do radical cooperative politics for. You think you are creating a new radical environment. You don't think you're creating a space for somebody to get bullied.

When discussing the dynamics at Fareshares and some of the conflicts that had occurred there, more than one member of the collective put them down to the 'tyranny of structurelessness', a reference to Jo Freeman's classic activist text (1972) of the same name. In it, Freeman examines the issues she encountered within the women's liberation movement in the USA in the 1960s and '70s. She saw problems arising from informal structures, arguing that an ideal of structurelessness can often become a way of masking power, rather than genuinely eliminating it. As Ed explained,

> There is a bit of resistance to there being structures, but I think one of her [Freeman's] points is that there are always going to be structures… [There are] things that have gone on [at Fareshares] partly because people don't want to seem too rigid or formal about stuff. People want to think the best of each other and it's as if, if you have an identifiable process to deal with when people aren't acting responsibly it's somehow a bit not Fareshares-y enough.

The combination of this resistance to 'rules' or 'processes', and the fact that most volunteers already gave a lot of time and energy to keeping the project running, meant that it was not always easy to find the time and headspace to work on issues pre-emptively, instead reacting as situations arose.

Time was clearly a big concern for many of the current members of Fareshares during my fieldwork, causing tensions in terms of the commitment they could afford to make to the co-op through shifts and jobs, and the classically contentious issue of the time it takes to make decisions using a non-hierarchical, consensus model (Polletta 2012:12). This kind of work can be both mentally and emotionally taxing, and for some of the newer or younger members less wedded to ideas of anarchism or co-operation, it could feel inconvenient. As, Holly a newer member, put it,

> It's amazing in a way that they [co-operatives] can function with everyone just doing their own bit and managing to work alongside one another, but they can be really annoying... tedious… Theoretically it can be a utopian way of working but in practice, it's hard. It's easier to do something yourself or to have someone tell you what to do.

To do so, of course, would be to accept the authority of the person giving the orders and the structures of society that they represented.

For some, an inability to balance the time commitment and emotional labour needed to be an active, decision-making volunteer/member, with other commitments, values and aspects of their identities (class, mental health, race or ethnicity) could become a barrier to inclusion in the project, or a source of frustration. Reflecting on these changing times, Adina, one of Fareshares' founding members, who stopped volunteering many years ago but who still visits to do her shopping, told me,

> Now I think, for me, the reason why I'm not involved in Fareshares and I'm not involved in the local community that much is because in order to live it seems that I have to work incredibly hard. Rent goes up and up and up, and it seems to me that everyone I know it so busy, and so struggling to just make it… make everything work… It seemed to me that things were very different [when Fareshares opened], that people didn't have to kill themselves to just manage… and that things were cheaper and people helped each other a lot more. And that's partly why there was more community, maybe people just had a bit more time.

Adina's words are evocative of Theresa May's inaugural speech as Prime Minister in 2016, discussed in chapter one, and the lot of the people who are 'just about managing' (the JAMs as they came to be known) that she mentioned many times in her early days in the role. They also speak to the precarious times and subjectivities that have developed alongside the post-Fordist flexibilisation of the labour market in which risks and insecurities are transferred from the state or the employer onto workers and their families (Standing 2014:1). This can create enhanced feelings of anxiety, marginality and apprehension (Molé 2010). In combination with the precariousness of social protection and residency that come with welfare reform and the commoditisation of the housing market (Standing 2014:5), precarity could impact on people's relationship to time, making it feel as if it was in short supply.

The combination of this and the lack of connection some of the younger or newer members felt towards co-operation or non-hierarchical organising could also have consequences for some of the aspects of Fareshares' activities typically perceived to be the most performative, such as the consensus decision-making and direct democracy enacted at meetings (Graeber 2009:287). As Holly explained,

> I didn't go to any meetings for about a year because I thought, why do they have meetings? What are they for? I'm not going to any meetings… and then I went to one and realised all the work that was going on.

Despite this realisation, hers and other newer members' attendance was still intermittent, meaning decisions were often made by the same group of people who saw this as a central element of their work with the collective, therefore carving out the necessary time to attend, and in doing so, enhancing their own authority within the co-op.

Negotiating structures and power are classic concerns within grassroots activism (Freeman 1972; Gautney 2010; Polletta 2012; Kadir 2016), co-operative organising (Nash and Hopkins 1976:10; Kasmir 1996; Müller 1991), and more egalitarian or stateless social groups and societies (Barth 1965; Clastres and Hurley 1989; Scott 2009; Walker 2012). This, along with personal and collective ideologies, and the instrumental concerns of keeping the project running, are mutually constitutive in shaping the social practices, rationalities and structures of each co-op. While challenges have always existed within this context, arguably, the combination of precarious subjectivities and discordant values in terms of forms of organising can make horizontalist practices all the more challenging.

Leadership and ownership

Notions of hierarchy and authority also caused their tensions at St Hilda's. When Lourdes, the original food co-op coordinator, founded St Hilda's East Food Co-op in 2005 in collaboration with a local resident, she had hoped that it would become a fully community-organised co-operative. In this spirit, she arranged meetings and encouraged volunteers to make decisions, with the aim that St Hilda's East Community Centre would simply host the food co-op, while the members ran it. This never happened, however. As she explained,

> I think you need to have some driving forces… You need really key personalities who want to take on that role, because it's huge, it's massive and you know you need that

> ethical drive almost like this is part of my way I want to live, so unless you've got that it's very hard.

Clearly, for co-operation to work well, it has to be a choice willingly made by people with some interest in or connection to co-operative values; Lourdes did not find this level of interest or commitment amongst the volunteers who were working at the food co-op. St Hilda's has continued with this more vertical structure ever since.

Both Jenny, the current coordinator at St Hilda's, and Rupert, the community centre's director, were acutely aware of the fact that the scheme was not fully co-operative in structure. They still saw a sense of ownership and autonomy amongst volunteers as an important aspect of the food co-op, though. As Jenny recounted,

> I think for the first year or something that I was here, I couldn't work out why it was called a food co-op, and I was like really? Am I missing something? But then I thought it's a co-op in spirit. That's what it is, rather than on paper. And I think probably one of the challenges is just how you keep that spirit and the big thing is the ownership, that's the big, big thing that people feel it's theirs.

In her early twenties, Jenny had been part of a workers' co-op in Newcastle called the Red Herring, which operated as a wholefood shop and café. As a consequence, she had a strong sense of what it felt like to be a part of an autonomous collective, along with the challenges and rewards that came with it. As she put it, her time there really 'formed her', teaching her about work practices as well as food and cooking. The Red Herring was also a highly politicised environment in which one of its founders went to prison twice for his protest actions. The first time, this was for paying his taxes in bread (made at the co-operative) in protest against the use of tax revenue in the funding of arms, and the second, for refusing to pay the newly implemented 'poll tax'.[90]

As Jenny explained,

[90] A per-person household charge, which replaced a system of rates based on the rental value of a property. This was implemented by the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher between 1989-90. Its unpopularity led to widespread riots in the UK in 1990.

> The Red Herring was the most directly influential job in my life. I think it changed everything for me in terms of how I work. But I'm really glad I didn't do it to start with because I think part of its power was having the comparison to working in very hierarchical, at the bottom of the hierarchy as well, very profit driven... some pretty nasty environments at times in terms of how managers were… It was just kind of very exploitative. So, I'm really glad I'd had that before because I don't think I would have appreciated the Red Herring as much… I think I took a lot of the workers' co-op with me, wherever I've gone.

This is reflective of the potential pedagogical power of the alternative forms of sociality fostered at co-operatives such as Fareshares and the Red Herring, which Maria from Fareshares described above as 'the revolution'. In many ways, Jenny attempted to draw on this co-operativist ethos of autonomy and mutuality in her practices at St Hilda's Food Co-op.

Jenny tried hard to ensure that everyone was involved in making decisions about the food co-op on a day-to-day basis. These decisions could range from the way the produce was laid out on the tables to choosing which jobs volunteers wanted to do each session to making suggestions about the overall running of the food co-op and what it should stock. While some of the longer-running volunteers were very vocal about most aspects of the project, the jobs they wanted to do, or how it should run, some, typically newer, volunteers tended to defer to Jenny. To counter this, she tried to find ways of encouraging people to be confident in their own decision-making skills and other abilities, creating situations in which volunteers would support and teach each other various jobs. If one volunteer had done a lot to support and train a newer one, this might also mean that they were deferred to at times by this volunteer. Other volunteers also consulted longer-running members if they were unsure how to do something or if something small went wrong. The bigger the problem, though, the more quickly someone would take the decision to find Jenny. Ultimately, the buck stopped with her. She was responsible for ensuring the stall ran every week, that it was fully stocked, that there were enough volunteers to keep the project going, that it was not making a loss or wasting produce, that it had sufficient funding and fulfilled all of the requirements necessary to meet the funders' practical and bureaucratic requirements. In sum, the instrumental work of ensuring the co-op kept going (Polletta 2012:5) was on her shoulders.

Many volunteers would also go to Jenny to let her know what they wanted to learn rather than waiting for her to take the initiative. When volunteers told her about skills they were keen to acquire or the kind of work they wanted to go into, if there was anything she could do to facilitate this, she would. This was clearly an important part of her role as a volunteer coordinator, and one she took seriously. She put on training sessions whenever she could, and talked to others in the building about whether there were any opportunities for food co-op volunteers to get involved with volunteering at the crèche, reception or other projects. All this sat well within the professionalisation of the third sector and its role in facilitating employability (Rozakou 2016:85–86). After leaving the Red Herring, much of the work Jenny had done involved food, community building, care and a desire to help others. As many of these jobs were within the third sector, she was very familiar with the methods and logics of volunteer coordination. As a consequence, she attempted to negotiate the logics of co-operativism and a professionalised third sector at St Hilda's, which, at times, could be conflicting.

On many occasions at St Hilda's I heard volunteers identify Jenny as 'the boss' of the food co-op, to which she would reply, 'we're all the boss', feeling uncomfortable with this authoritative role. In many ways this highlighted the tension between the two value systems she attempted to work by as a co-operator with an interest in autonomy and ownership, and a coordinator with a role of support and facilitation. Although the food co-op was set up as a vertical scheme, Jenny was keen to highlight the difference between a manager, or boss, and a volunteer coordinator, whose job it was to support volunteers (practically and pastorally) as much as it was to facilitate the project. Identifying Jenny as 'the boss' also acted as a reminder of the 'complex flows of power' involved in care work, however unwillingly or unwittingly they produce forms of hierarchy (Lawson 2007:5).

Structures of care

Within the pre-existing vertical structure of the community centre, there were clear discourses around service provision and support. Arguably, it would have required substantial work and a strong collective desire from participants in the food co-op to break with the rationality and practices of the institution, where those who provided support (paid workers) and those who received support (volunteers, community centre project service users and food co-op customers) were more clearly defined in some ways (although as discussed in

chapter three, volunteers were also involved with giving support to each other and to visitors to the project). Lourdes told me that the centre itself had felt like another barrier to community ownership, 'I tried. I really tried to think round it, tried to give ownership over, but it was really hard because the premises was St Hilda's'; the community centre, therefore, wanted to have some kind of say in what was going on, and who was working there. All topics that required monitoring within the bureaucracies of the community centre.

As for Jenny, despite the tensions this sense of hierarchy created for her, in line with the community centre's ideals and her experiences in the voluntary sector, she felt that imposing structure, was a way to provide a more supportive environment,

> I think one of the things about having a paid position, whether it's me or whoever it is, is about the support for people … paid workers, you know, they're contracted to be there and it means that the co-op can be more inclusive, it can support more people, you have that guaranteed continuity, you have that guaranteed support there...

Volunteers knew how things worked and what they were required to do, which, Jenny pointed out, was particularly important for some of the volunteers with learning differences. Equally, no one was expected to take on levels of responsibility that felt incompatible with their skills or the demands of their lives. As she saw it, the reliability of a paid co-ordinator, whose job included 'care work' (Alber and Drotbohm 2015), as well as practical management of the project, was the best way to offer the support and emotional labour (Hochschild 2003) deemed necessary. This helped to ensure a more inclusive environment, in which there were volunteers with diverse support needs ranging from learning differences to mental health or personal issues, along with others keen to work on their English language or employability. In relation to ethnic and racial diversity, this role as a paid coordinator also meant she had more time, and more authority, to put into fostering inclusive practices.

Care was at the heart of the community centre and the food co-op's 'organisational ethos' (Cloke, May, and Johnsen 2010:101) and its staff's responsibilities. Practices of inclusion and care imprinted the centre with strong ideals around the nature and shape of a 'good', or 'caring society' (Thelen 2015b:499), while also informing the ways in which its projects and social practices were structured. Jenny tried to be attuned to different volunteers' needs, interests and vulnerabilities. She attended diligently to her pastoral duties, often sitting and

listening to details of the problems volunteers were dealing with in their lives or concerns they had. She offered a friendly face and a sympathetic ear. When volunteers were facing particularly severe mental or physical health issues, Jenny also checked in on non-food co-op days, made visits to hospitals and, in one case, accompanied a volunteer to a hospital appointment at the weekend. Care was also 'realized in physical acts' that communicated 'affect, attention, empathy, and copresence – a touch on the arm, a tenderness in tone of voice, a hug' (Black 2018:82). In doing so, she imprinted the space with a certain set of ethics and values – both hers and the centres, and with affective forms of sociality. Many of us reproduced these, offering hugs, smiles and a sense of a more familial environment; family was a word that people often used to describe how the centre and the food co-op felt to them.

This care, as opposed to simply professionalised support, was also reflected in the kinds of volunteers that St Hilda's worked with. When I interviewed Lourdes, the original food co-op coordinator at St Hilda's, for example, she told me that no one had wanted to take Arpan, the longest-running volunteer on, as his learning differences meant he had higher support needs than some volunteer projects felt they could manage. 'But, it's really worked here' she told me. As well as continuing to work with Arpan, and ensuring that he was supported and working well with others, in line with recommendations from support workers at his assisted accommodation, Jenny also worked with another volunteer whose mental health issues made it too challenging for her to come in on a Thursday when so many people were around. Instead, she came on a Monday to help Jenny with admin jobs for the food co-op, or practice using the till and scale.

Within these relations of care, gendered labour undoubtedly also played a part. Unlike the emotional labour of service work that Hochschild (2003) presents, the ideology felt somewhat different here. Rather than being purely a form of one-sided, commoditised service provision, Jenny's care work (Alber and Drotbohm 2015), combined with attempts to empower and facilitate volunteers within the project, helped to foster a sense of mutuality between food co-op participants who often checked in with each other, and also with Jenny, about how everyone was doing and how their families were, or followed up on health or personal issues that people had mentioned before. The majority of the volunteers were also women,

although the men who were closely involved with the project also checked in with others and asked about family members.

In almost all cases, volunteers seemed to see the care they received from Jenny and the community centre as well as from each other in a positive light. People regularly discussed how lovely or how supportive Jenny was. And at times of difficulty, it was often this care and the ways in which Jenny would accommodate different practical and emotional needs that kept volunteers coming back for a long time (often years). In all of the 'volunteer of the month' interviews I conducted for the newsletter, volunteers also commented on how much they appreciated the levels of support they received from Jenny in both emotional and practical forms.[91] Zina, for example, explained how a close friend had passed away unexpectedly not long before she started volunteering at the food co-op. Although this had made her reluctant to join the food co-op, she found Jenny and Kim, the volunteer coordinator for the centre, very supportive. Coming to the centre and making these connections had helped to get her out of the house and to distract her from her grief for a few hours. She suggested that it would be a supportive place for anyone having a tough time.

I also experienced this environment of care positively. While dealing with family issues ranging from brothers with mental and physical health problems, to my mother fracturing her spine part way through my fieldwork (and my resultant care responsibilities), St Hilda's felt like a positive environment in which I knew I could talk about what was going on in my life, feel supported and listened to in a non-judgemental way. Equally, Jenny always made it clear that whatever I, or any other volunteer, chose to contribute to the project as a volunteer on any given week would be appreciated. As she explained to me one day, this went against the standard volunteer coordinator protocol, in which enforcing time management was an important part of employability training, but from her perspective, it was important to respect the challenges people faced in their lives and the gift of time they were choosing to give to the food co-op, without creating situations in which this free labour could be taken for granted, or in any way exploited.

[91] Several also mentioned Kim, the volunteer coordinator.

Reward and recognition

I have many material reminders of my time as a volunteer at St Hilda's – a branded recipe book and tote bag given to welcome me to the food co-op; cards and gifts received for Christmases, birthdays and other occasions, and seven certificates in total to mark almost two years volunteering with the community centre. These include National Volunteers' Week certificates given out every year to thank volunteers for their commitment and contribution, others are for first aid and food hygiene, and one was given to each food co-op volunteer purely because we had not had any certificates for a while and Arpan, whose birthday was coming up, had been asking. There is one more that I hold particularly dear. This was framed and publicly presented to me at the centre's annual general meeting-cum-open day in 2016 by one of the centre's trustees. It reads,

> *This certificate is awarded to Celia Plender for her absolute dedication to the Food Co-op and energy for developing new creative ideas and contributions across projects at St Hilda's East.*
>
> *Her practical support is second to none, such as volunteering double shifts whilst we get the new evening Food Co-op off the ground. Her expert knowledge of co-operative working in the community and food in general continues to be a massive benefit, especially sharing her dynamic sushi making talents so generously.*

Each year a handful of volunteers are singled out and commended for their contribution to the community centre, and in 2016 it had been my turn. This certificate now hangs on my wall at home.

During the 20 months I spent at St Hilda's, Jenny and Rupert often told me how much they appreciated the time and effort I put into volunteering there, and as a researcher, I did put in a lot of hours. As I often tried to explain to them, though, it was in my interest to do this. Getting involved with lots of different aspects of the food co-op and the centre enabled me to gain a better understanding of the context I was working in and the ins and outs of how these institutions functioned. As a consequence, when opportunities arose to become involved with different activities, I tended to put myself forward – provided it did not seem as if I was taking the opportunity away from another volunteer. And if I was asked to help out with something, I said 'yes' whenever possible. I therefore volunteered to work the evening

co-op when this started as I was keen to see who came and how it would develop. I also hosted various vegetarian sushi cookery classes for the food co-op, the Older People's Project, and an 'Apple Day'[92] at a local housing estate, where the food co-op has a stall every year. For another event I made shepherd's pie for one hundred people – all halal and half of them vegetarian. I wrote a regular volunteer/customer of the month section for the newsletter and did interviews and wrote up reports for the food co-op's customer survey and Older People's Project's monitoring report for the local council. All this helped me to get to know more people within the community centre's networks as well as offering valuable insights into aspects of each project and its monitoring requirements. As far as I was concerned, I owed thanks to Jenny, Rupert and everyone else who welcomed me into the centre (staff, volunteers and customers) as it was due to their openness, accommodation and support that I was able to do my PhD research there. The time and effort I put in was, therefore, far from a 'pure gift' (Parry 1986).

As a charity with non-profit projects, the centre was reliant on having enough volunteers. Having regular volunteers who were committed and reliable, could make a big difference to a project's success. Indeed, with the survey work I did with Sustain's Food Co-op Project, lack of volunteers was commonly listed as a challenge for food co-ops, and in some cases the reason why they had been unable to continue. This circulation of gifts, whether through volunteer labour, or material signs of the centre's gratitude, Jenny's support or the regular thanks the centre gave in exchange for this work, undoubtedly strengthened social bonds within the food co-op, creating a sense of social belonging and attempting to counteract the potential for feelings of alienated labour (Muehlebach 2012:48).[93]

Making sure volunteers felt valued, appreciated and supported was an important aspect of St Hilda's work, and it would seem that the centre generally struck a good balance. If it had been hard to get 'that sustainable volunteer group' in the early days, as Lourdes the original food

[92] A community event celebrating apples, orchards and other harvest produce.

[93] By comparison, in principle, there was no specific need for thanks at Fareshares as we were all there by choice and also chose how many jobs and how much responsibility we wanted to take on. Nonetheless, there were times when work could feel underappreciated, and others when a request from another member to do a job which was not put in the most tactful way could lead to frustration, feeling more like an order than an egalitarian enquiry. Again this highlights the potential for imbalances of power, as well as the ways in which an investment in the project and the weight or responsibility that came with it, leading to forms of self-exploitation due to concerns for the project's wellbeing, whether properly warranted, or as a consequence of previous life experiences and a compulsion to 'take action where others hesitated' (Müller 1991:115).

co-op coordinator recalled, by the time I arrived at the food co-op they had developed a good strategy for both recruiting and retaining volunteers. While I was there, the project had a consistent group of regular volunteers, some of whom had been there for several years.

Jenny, the paid employee and representative of the centre, was the key provider of support and care. While all of the practices which helped to enhance each volunteer's sense of belonging to the centre and the food co-op – the giving of certificates, the training of volunteers, the use of established volunteer support practices – are all 'key features of a more bureaucratized' and 'stratified' sociality' (Rozakou 2016:88), this was also tempered with Jenny's own values and concerns. Given the nature of contemporary working conditions, Jenny was keen to ensure that volunteers at St Hilda's felt valued. She had concerns about the ways in which the volunteer sector had changed during her time doing this kind of work, and what this meant in terms of the meaning of volunteering and its relationship to paid work and state structures. As she explained to me,

> I'm very conscious of volunteering and exploitation really and I think there have been big changes in paid roles becoming volunteer roles and what that means in terms of exploitation and in terms of what people need really…

Despite the move away from the worker-citizen to the consumer-citizen at the end of the post-war welfare consensus, labour, whether paid or not, has continued to be a significant aspect of citizenship. It is a means of demonstrating a good work ethic as well as deservingness for state welfare. This is highlighted in the language of successive regimes ranging from Thatcher's active citizens to Labour's active communities and Cameron's Big Society. As Patrick (2017:5) points out, Theresa May's inaugural speech in the role of Prime Minister, also emphasised the 'hard-working families' who were 'just about managing' while still neglecting 'the needs of those struggling but not in work: not so much those just-about-managing as those not-managing-at-all'. This, again, works to reinforce traditional values around hard work and cohesive family units, while excluding those who are not seen to be contributing sufficiently.

Much emphasis has been put onto making the transition from 'economic inactivity to paid employment' in recent years (Patrick 2017:4), along with an imperative to demonstrate the ways in which citizens are attempting to take responsibility for their own lives, needs and

communities. Nonetheless, McKenzie suggests (2015:13) that 'work and employment have not been the route 'out of poverty' that the last two governments insisted it is', and that people on '[l]ow pay, no pay, zero-hours contracts, and low-grade self-employed work' often end up oscillating between short contracts and period of benefit receipt. As a consequence, she suggests that this has 'left families in extremely precarious positions in recent years'.

According to the Office for National Statistics, around 900,000 people in the UK today rely on jobs with zero-hour contracts. And, as Renwick (2017) suggests, 'these people start every week not knowing how much work they will get or how much money they will earn.' This no doubt adds to their sense of precarity. 'Informal or casual employment of this kind' he continues, 'helps explain why Britain's unemployment rate has not sky-rocketed since the financial crash of 2008.'

Many of the volunteers at St Hilda's who were out of work were very keen to get into employment, and, in some cases, were also being pressurised to do so from the Jobcentres they attended. A significant number of them did not make it into this rotation between benefits and short contracts, however, as they were not even able to get into these precarious forms of work. Several of them faced obstacles to entering the job market ranging from language barriers to mental health issues or learning disabilities and caring responsibilities for young children or relatives with additional support needs. Amira, for example, a single mother with three small children who had moved to the UK from Bangladesh when she got married had been looking for a job for some time. While she was not entirely fluent in English, she had strong communication skills and had built up her fluency and confidence while at the co-op. She told me on one occasion that the only job that she had been offered so far, involved working 9-5pm in a central London chain retail store, which was neither possible, nor practical for her as she had to take her children to and from school and nursery each day. The retailer showed no interest in accommodating her needs, and presumably had many other people lined up to take the job, which meant they did not have to make any concessions to prospective employees.

Some of the volunteers at St Hilda's had also either been encouraged or referred to the food co-op by employment advisors or support workers, while others had come in through school and university placement schemes. Speaking to Zina, for example, who had started at St

Hilda's about a month before I did, she told me that she had first heard about the food co-op from an employment advisor at the housing association where she and her daughters lived. She had been made redundant from a clerical job a couple of years earlier, and since then she had been devoting her time to facilitating the support needs of her autistic daughter. Now she felt ready to find a part-time job, although she was aware that this may be challenging to fit around her daughter's needs and her associated caring responsibilities.

Although working in food or catering was not necessarily what she had envisaged, she still decided to take up the placement, and she seemed to find her time with St Hilda's to be positive. She had learned about all sorts of different foods, while also making strong connections with other people. She had therefore decided to stay on with the food co-op after the official five- week placement had concluded.

Another issue in relation to volunteering which concerned Jenny was the 'pressure on people in terms of their benefits and the welfare to work programme and where unpaid work crosses over with volunteering.' As she explained to me,

> There's a very thin line and if people are feeling they have to do volunteering for their benefits, then it's not volunteering, it's sort of coercion. Volunteering is, it's in the name, it's about freedom and wanting to give time to something. It's not about feeling you won't have any money if you don't, you'll have the very bare minimum. It, sort of, turns into coercion then. It's been a worrying trend, I think.

In the absence of employment, volunteerism is one of the ways in which citizens can demonstrate their desire to work, their usefulness to society, their sense of responsibility and, therefore, their deservingness to be an equal member of a society whose resources are becoming more scarce. This form of volunteering can feel more like a duty than a choice (Muehlebach 2012:139). This highlights the ways in which the voluntary sector has become embroiled with the punitive measures apparent in welfare reform that I discussed in chapter two. It is also another aspect of precarious labour regimes where people are channelled into low-pay or no-pay internships and volunteer positions (Standing 2014:27).

Jenny went on to describe some of the situations that she had witnessed as both an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher and a staff member of an east London volunteer centre,

> …and now, this is quite anecdotal, I haven't done the research to back this up, it's anecdotal and what I see and hear. But how it feels to me as an ESOL teacher, it's gone from people being stopped from coming to ESOL classes because of their benefits – they need to be ready for work, they can't go to classes – or being pulled out of classes to go to Jobcentre classes. To now, actually volunteering isn't enough. There was a point where, you know, you're not work ready, so you have to get a volunteer placement. And now I feel… it's kind of like, I'm hearing some volunteers saying I'm not allowed to volunteer because I've got to go and do this for the Jobcentre. So, it's kind of like, you're trying to help people into work because they want work. From various reasons from childcare to language skills to other skills to other family commitments… there's a whole array of reasons that might be barriers and you're trying to work with people to try to help them overcome those barriers, but then the Jobcentre seems to want to pull people into their way. So, I don't know… and obviously in terms of disability, and ESA [Employment and Support Allowance], and the kind of assessments that people have had to go under for those... I'm continuously worried basically. I really worry about that in terms of members of my own family, in terms of volunteers at the food co-op. In terms of how we live, how we treat each other as a community, as a society because I think they are inhumane… more when I was doing enrolment and stuff like that. There were times when there were people who were so unwell, so unwell, just being forced basically to sign up for courses or come to do job search and it's just like just so not what you need now. I feel for… I wouldn't want to work in a Jobcentre. I feel for their staff. I don't know how they are managing really. Where that's going especially after another Tory Government, I really worry. And I think if at the food co-op, I feel quite confident that the volunteers overall are there because they want to be there, and I'd find it difficult if that changed.

This again highlights the emphasis on getting people into any work available, however precarious or inappropriate, rather than jobs that may involve stability, satisfaction or career progression (Patrick 2017:13). Again, this impacts on people's relationship to time, their

ability to look beyond the present and plan for the future, as much as it does their sense of self (Patrick 2017:3). This, then, has the potential to lead to even greater forms of alienation, frustration and anomie (Standing 2014:33).

Conclusions

Where contemporary waged labour regimes have increasingly been associated with feelings of precarity, disenchantment and opportunism, Muehlebach (2012:48) argues that expectations have grown for the voluntary sector to foster affective environments of trust, reciprocity and generosity. This is then 'supposed to circulate back into the wider community and contribute to collective moral well-being' (ibid.) At the centre of this regime is the idea that volunteers will derive pleasure from their unwaged work, which combines self-sacrifice with self-realization, making them the 'paradigmatic neoliberal subject' that 'fits effortlessly into a fundamental shift' in relationships towards work. As Donzelot puts it, from 'pleasure in work' to 'pleasure through work' (Donzelot, 1991 in Muehlebach 2012:48). While St Hilda's is undoubtedly embroiled in these dynamics as a centre which fosters volunteer activities, with trained coordinators who are familiar with the logics and practices that have come with the expansion and professionalisation of the third sector, I argue that there are also other values at work, associated with the centre and Jenny's own ethics of care and experiences of co-operation and austerity.

While she works hard to create an unalienated work environment for the volunteers, this has as much to do with fostering a safe and supportive space in the face of a punitive welfare regime as it does the production of 'active' or 'ethical' citizens. As a consequence, it is Jenny who enacts her ethics and politics in relation to the changing political-economic situation in Britain, and the moral judgements this creates in relation to legitimate citizenship and the forms of care that it erodes. It is, perhaps, her who becomes an ethical citizen then out of both solidarity and compassion (Muehlebach 2012). And what she gives to the project clearly goes beyond a standard volunteer coordinator role.

While the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of the voluntary sector may foster certain kinds of citizenship and subjectivity, it has also made the sector more accountable, professional or even 'business-like' at times (Land and King 2014:929). And here, these structures may have acted as a barrier to Lourdes' attempts to create a more autonomous,

member-owned food co-op. While Lourdes was unable to push against this, in other ways, Jenny did contest some of the discourses and pedagogical practices that came with this professionalisation – such as strict time keeping. In doing so, she attempted to acknowledge the complexities of people's lives, needs and vulnerabilities, rather than work by homogenising rationalist logics, which are unlikely to work for all (Scott 1999). These diversions from more standardised approaches speak to 'the meaning of relationality and the broader cosmologies on which it is grounded' (Rozakou 2016:81) within the food co-op and the community centre. In the case of St Hilda's, these cosmologies clearly encompass some of the logics of charitable service provision, co-operative organising as well as more neoliberal aspects apparent in the third sector, which relate to citizen's rights and responsibilities.

Jenny and I often talked about the structures of St Hilda's and of Fareshares and the difference between the two in terms of practices, social make-up and affective relations. On one occasion I explained to her,

> I know coming here each week, it's all doing what it needs to anyway irrespective of whether I'm here. So, everyone does their jobs, but sometimes it's nice to have someone to defer to, or not to have the weight of that responsibility for making sure it keeps going…

'Is that at the cost of ownership do you think?' she replied, alluding to the dilemma she faced between values of autonomy and mutual support, and more service-driven or charitable care provision which can entail more hierarchical relations. While the vertical structures in place at the community centre and food co-op may be instrumental in the sufficient provision of care, support and inclusivity, they also raise questions around autonomy, which sat uncomfortably with Jenny's values in relation to work and co-operation, and these did not feel entirely resolvable.

Fareshares and St Hilda's are both historically and socially constituted within specific visions of community, and established discourses of structure and hierarchy. As Lisa from Fareshares put it, 'there's always power going on' however much a project might aspire towards structurelessness. Through their practices within these spaces, food co-op participants (including coordinators) are 'simultaneously undergoing and exercising' power to conform to, contest and reshape their shifting structures, discourses and rationalities (Foucault 1980:98).

As Graeber (2004:34) argues, 'all social systems are a tangle of contradictions,' however, and inevitably, these contradictions can lead to practical and ideological tensions about the structures, practices and the balance of power within the system.

At Fareshares, they attempt to enact their political values around non-hierarchical organising, affective relations of care and anti-capitalism through 'everyday organizational practices… "learning how to organise the world differently" through experimentation and direct action' (Land and King 2014:929). In doing so, they 'attempt to enact a different idea of how the world might be organised', while declaring that 'another world is possible' (Smith 2008 in Land and King 2014:928). While these practices may have performative potential, they also have their challenges, however. People bring their own values, experiences of work, life, economic relations or activism with them to these spaces, including rationalist desires for efficiency or concerns about lack of time, and all these can impact on the dynamics of the food co-op.

Arguably, affective spaces such as St Hilda's and Fareshares can become all the more important in the face of changing welfare and working conditions. Such conditions can compel people to seek out spaces of community and connection where they might feel supported and/or empowered. The work of non-hierarchical organising, consensus decision-making and member-ownership all take time and effort though, and this can lead to imbalances of power, exclusions, abuses and feelings of alienation, as it did at Fareshares. And here, people's own vulnerabilities, needs and concerns, as much as their life experiences, can act as a catalyst for these behaviours.

Ideals of 'structurelessness' are clearly also a factor. By resisting structures, Freeman (1972:4) suggests, rather than abolishing power, a group simply 'abdicate[s] the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it.' At Fareshares, this allowed members of the group to act in certain ways without a sense of accountability to the collective as a whole. It also made it harder for the collective to then deal with the situation or help to limit the authority of these people within the collective as situations arose. Following the publication of Freeman's paper on structurelessness (1972), many activists (mis-)understood it to be a call for the necessity of hierarchy and how to institutionalise those that already exist by making them more formal and visible (Graeber 2015:202). As such, it was seen as a

criticism of the anarchist ideal of spontaneous order. Instead, it was believed to promote ‘a mass organisation with strong, centralised control, which required rules, policies and other bureaucratic forms, which come with the modernist rationality of being governed (Graeber 2015, pp. 202–5). The anarchist ideal is not without its order though, as Malatesta (1897) suggests,

> organization, far from creating authority, is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each one of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in the collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders.

People have to have the time, energy and commitment to put this order in place though.

Conclusion

Autonomy

'Throughout the history of our civilization,' Kropotkin tells us, 'two traditions, two opposing tendencies have confronted each other' (1896). One is reflective of a centralised top-down model, the other, horizontal. Which to adopt has been a classic tension within leftist political discourses for at least a century and a half. It is also a tension that plays out in food co-ops as I discussed in chapter five. And while good organisational structures can lead to good care, this has the potential to come at the cost of ownership and autonomy – key components of the co-operative imaginary.

Perhaps the most famous example of this tension within leftist politics is the dispute between Marx and Bakunin over statist versus anti-authoritarian forms of socialism. While both Marxist and anarchist approaches ultimately worked from an anti-capitalist stance, which revolved around the desire to create 'a society of liberty and equality' (Miller 1984:78), Marxists believed they should take control of the state, while anarchist proposed to reject it. This disagreement ultimately led to a cleavage between Marxism and anarchism.

Although the Marxist approach may have prevailed in the 20th century in terms of the trajectory of socialism and communism (which dampened much popular enthusiasm for their viability as emancipatory and egalitarian alternatives to a capitalist system in Western contexts), in the 21st century, anarchism seems to have had its moment. As discussed in this thesis, anarchism and punk both became a part of the zeitgeist from the late 1970s into the '80s in much of the Global North, and it was this energy that brought Fareshares Food Co-op into being.

Then, from the 1990s onwards, a growing number of social movements started to centre their practices around ideals of autonomy and non-hierarchical organising. These movements range from alterglobalization (Juris and Khasnabish 2013; Nash 2004; Maeckelbergh 2011) to the Zapatistas (Juris and Khasnabish 2013) and Occupy (Graeber 2009; Graeber 2014). Indeed, as Graeber suggested in 2002 (61-2), much of the 'creative energy for radical politics is now coming from anarchism… This draws on practices of direct action and the rejection of a politics

which appeals to governments to modify their behaviour, in favour of physical interventions against state power in a form that itself prefigures an alternative' (ibid.).

For many of these movements, neoliberal capitalism has been a fundamental catalyst for their actions. This is a response to the perceived concentration of power into fewer and fewer hands in both national and global contexts where political elites are believed to 'have chosen to protect corporations, financial institutions and the rich at the expense of the majority' (Occupy London n.d.). The Zapatistas, for example, started as a direct response to the processes of neoliberalisation taking place in Mexico. Two years after this occupation, the Zapatistas hosted the International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in Chiapas, which marked the beginning of the wider network of transnational activism known as the Global Justice Movement which critiqued financial capitalism, the hegemony of transnational organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund along with trade deals such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Graeber 2002).[94]

Occupy has also been instrumental in bringing 'a critique of capitalism, and constitutive practices of counter-capitalist organization, into popular discourse in recent years' (Land and King 2014:928). The financial crisis of 2008, combined with the rise of the global Occupy movement in 2011, caused many to question whether this could be the beginning of the end of neoliberalism (Comaroff 2011). Food co-operatives were also present at this time, becoming 'a focal point for action (and reflection) on contemporary economic processes' as well as the role of food within (Pratt and Luetchford 2013:1). Yet, within a year of its inception, the Occupy movement had fizzled out, and neoliberal capitalism also continued in its many different forms. Many of the food co-ops founded in this era also proved ephemeral, suffering from issues such as financial precarity, activist burn-out amongst its members, inconsistent volunteer numbers or the end of funding rounds.

As Bauman (1976:14) suggests, 'when a mind puts forward an idea, it is because it is already in the air'. Countercultural imaginaries, then, 'are shaped, like culture in general, under the double pressure of the galvanising feeling of deprivation and the chastening squeeze of

[94] For this reason, the Zapatistas declared their revolutionary intentions on the day that he North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect.

omnipresent and stubborn realities' (ibid.). In the face of growing divisions, inequalities and the condensation of political and economic power into fewer hands, this meant that greater autonomy and ownership were 'in the air' as part of a popular left-wing vision of an alternative world at this time. This was a way for everyday citizens to call for more control of the global economy.

While the logics of laissez-faire call for minimal intervention in the market, the accompanying liberal and neoliberal discourses of governmentality also call for a less paternalistic social contract with the citizenry. From the late 1970s onwards, much policy within the UK has called on citizens to be more active, developing localised, community coping strategies rather than state dependencies (Rose 2000). The food co-op has also been a part of this call, as the discussion in this thesis of the development of food-access-based food co-ops, such as St Hilda's in the 1990s and 2000s highlights. Although this process of welfare withdrawal has clearly been going on for some time, post-2008 austerity saw this accelerate considerably, adding increasing levels of conditionality to state welfare, which various scholar have characterised as punitive in their approach (Patrick 2017; Koch 2018). For many this stands in stark contrast to the model of social citizenship that developed in post-Second World War Britain, and that time period has become crystallised for some in forms of nostalgic longing.

Autonomy and democracy have also been a fundamental aspect of the Brexit debate. In Brexit we see a demand for the nation to take back control from the EU, returning Britain to its former 'glory'. This, along with growing levels of populism within the UK and further afield, have led political commentators to suggest that we are living in 'an age of nostalgia' in which '[m]illions of people, particularly in advanced economies, believe that life was better 50 years ago' (Dassù and Campanella 2019). Within these forms of nostalgia there's a belief that there were more job opportunities, communities were more cohesive, welfare provision was more expansive, and technology moved at a more manageable pace during the Golden Era of welfare. While horizontalist groups attempt to bring the future into the present through practices (Bryant and Knight 2019:14), within populist discourses, there is, in a sense, a belief in reversibility and a hope that the values and societal or political economic conditions of a

different era can be restored (Boym 2002:xviii), however idealised aspects of this former time period might be (Angé and Berliner 2016:4).[95]

The rise of populism also has much to do with political economy. Masquelier (2017:2) argues that the strategies proposed by populist leaders, which often revolve around issues such as the protection of workers' rights in the face of precarization, 'effectively seek to resist… essential features of neoliberal globalization: transnational movements dictated by the logic of an increasingly globalized and free market.' As a consequence, this 'demand for control' is also a 'demand for economic change'. As he notes, these concerns are also often 'wrapped up in cultural issues, with identity and, more often than not, race playing the role of signifier for the economic troubles of the white working classes.' Within populism, there is a very different understanding of responsibility to that of horizontalism. The populist belief is that the state should have a welfarist attitude towards its citizens and an interventionist approach towards the global economy.

But, what of the food co-operative in this environment? Clearly, the overview above has taken a broad-brush approach to depict the political-economic changes that have occurred since the late 1970s. Within the wider thesis, however, through the prism of the food co-operative, I have attempted to paint a more complex picture of experiences of political-economic change and of austerity; of those who are impacted by issues such as poverty (food or otherwise), precarity and welfare reform, as well as how. I have also attempted to nuance understandings of who chooses to engage with more 'ethical' forms of food consumption, and the perceived socio-economic associations they often carry through exploring the social worlds of Fareshares and St Hilda's East. I take a closer look at each of these food co-ops in the following section.

The politics of food co-ops

Throughout my fieldwork, I often found myself thinking back to my encounter with Brian – the volunteer who left Fareshares out of disappointment with its politics that I discussed in the introduction. This made me ask myself what 'the political' looks like. How does it sound and feel? For Brian, Fareshares clearly did not *sound* right with all the talk of food, health and

[95] Boym (2002:xviii) suggests that this restorative form of 'nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition.'

conspiracies, rather than protests or other forms of direct action. As for Fareshares-member Holly, the co-op did not *look* right – it was a relic from another era, 'a living museum', as she put it. While this felt familiar and homely to her, having grown up in Bristol – a city well known for its 'alternative' scene[96] – she had questions about whether the co-op, in its current form, was really the best fit for an era of growing concerns about the impact of climate change and plastic wastage.

Holly was not alone amongst the newer and younger members considering the co-op's appearance. At one meeting another member, Tom, who was equally motivated by environmental concerns, suggested that he could make rustic chalk board signs out of recycled wood for the co-op. They would be attached to the shelves and used to display the prices. This kind of aesthetic can often be found in trendy wholefood or no-packaging shops and farmers' markets. Perhaps this was what consumption-based food and environmental politics looked like to him.[97]

Holly also questioned the co-op's ability to engage with the local community in an era of growing inequality – were the products, practices and structures right for local people living on low incomes? Could the co-op meet its desire to make food more accessible? And if so, to whom? Ed had concerns about prices as well – if the goods on sale were not much cheaper than those at the supermarket, then how did this impact on the food co-op's aims or values? For others, such as Nuala, however, Fareshares did provide a vital resource even if not all of the products were financially accessible. Indeed, it was austerity that had drawn her to the food co-op in the first place, and in the spirit of the project's values around mutual aid, she was keen to give back by volunteering as well as shopping there.

While some saw the radical qualities of non-hierarchical organising as the core of Fareshares' political action, here too, there was disagreement. For some of the members this did not fit with their lives or their visions of society. Clearly, non-hierarchical forms of organising and the use of consensus decision-making take time, work, skills, and considerable emotional labour. Ed reflected on the ways in which spaces to learn about collective organising have diminished

[96] As one newspaper article describes it 'Bristol marches to the beat of its own drum' and it refuses to 'kowtow to the homogenising forces of modern capitalism… a visible, city-wide phenomenon manifested in endless community groups and co-ops' (Naylor 2016).

[97] Although no one objected to the suggestion, this did not happen during my fieldwork, or afterwards as far as I am aware.

over the years, connecting this to the decline of trade unionism in the UK – a symptom of the changing realm of collective political action as discussed in the introduction. Others put this down to the lack of available free time – a consequence of the precarization of contemporary Britain for an increasingly wider group of people (Standing 2014).

As Fareshares' negotiations between its past and present identity highlight, alternative forms of politics have to be of the moment in some way, either capturing people's imaginations or catering to their needs. Although they may have a lineage, in order to survive, activist groups have to respond to the here and now. Fareshares' appearance, practices and values may have made sense within the context of the housing and food-based activism of the 1980s and '90s, but how did the food co-op capture the 'structure of feeling' (as Raymond Williams might call it) for the current era?

Clearly, people are drawn to collectives, such as Fareshares, for a whole range of different reasons, some more pragmatic, others ethical or ideological – often a combination of all three. As is common within collectives, these different ideals may not always add up to a coherent whole, but at Fareshares many of the volunteers shared 'convictions and ideas that are in opposition to the principles of the dominant capitalist society' in some way (Müller 1991:25). This, and (for many) the food politics that the food co-op practiced, was where collective members still saw political potentiality. Like many food co-ops that have come before, then, Fareshares attempted to be a counterculture to capitalism in some ways. In doing so, the food co-op's members tried to 'rethink the elusively simple act of provisioning on different economic, moral, and social premises' (Grasseni 2013:174).

Members were able to imagine in practice the aspiration of less alienated forms of work, sociality, care and consumption. Reflecting on Fareshares' political qualities, Nuala told me that 'the act in itself is a political act. Not being beholden to big corporations. That in itself is a political thing.' As Grasseni (2013:174) argues, all these 'shared practices and discourse about the economy at once constrain and enable collective deliberation and political imagination'. While these practices attempt to think beyond capitalism in some ways, many of them are still embedded within the structures and common sense of capitalism. As Anna Tsing puts it, '[c]ontemporary commerce works within the constraints and possibilities of capitalism (Tsing 2015:5). Equally, capitalism itself now has 'a decidedly moralized face; a

moral neoliberal that exists as a correlate to its market counterpart' (Muehlebach 2012:50). Fair Trade mechanisms and forms of ethical consumption are clearly intertwined with this more moral form of capitalism. By caring through food for people, the environment or the economy, arguably, shoppers enacted the forms of ethical citizenship that Muehlebach (2012) identifies with the moral neoliberal. Rather than succumb to 'a kind of critical melancholy' (Land and King 2014:924 after Gibson-Graham 2006), however, if we read these activities within Fareshares' own terms, or indeed, those of the co-operative more generally, they still leave space for performativity. Bringing these 'marginalized, hidden and alternative economic activities to light' makes 'them more real and more credible as objects of policy and activism' (Gibson-Graham 2008:614). This reading also contests understandings of capitalism as a constant unwavering progress, showing ways in which it can be more patchy (Tsing 2015:5), meaning alternatives are more possible (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Within St Hilda's everyday activities, power is also experienced, enacted and contested (Foucault 1980:98). Here, the use of a non-profit model has more to do with access to affordable, fresh and healthy food, than an overt anti-capitalist stance. Nonetheless, through her practices within the food co-op, Jenny does attempt to contest other societal structures. Despite St Hilda's Food Co-op's historical connection to New Labour policy in relation to active citizenship and a strong third sector, which fills in the gaps that welfare withdrawal leaves behind, Jenny still negotiates differing ideologies and value systems in her role as a volunteer coordinator. Through her practices, she challenges some of the rigidity that comes with the pedagogical techniques and tropes of a more professionalised third sector, and the perceptions of legitimate citizenship that they represent. By fostering a more mutual environment, she also attempts to work by a more co-operative ethic of care (Lawson 2007), built around reciprocal support, and an understanding that we all need care as well as give it. Within this recognition, Kneafsey et al. (2008:41–43) argue, there is political potential.

By enacting hers and the community centre's ethos of care and inclusion, Jenny also attempts performative practices – imagining what a more inclusive society might look like in terms of race, ethnicity, class and ability or attempting to bring different structures of work and volunteerism into being through practice. These attempts at inclusivity are no-doubt meaningful in an era in which benefit recipients are increasingly stigmatised, while racist and Xenophobic sentiments are also on the rise.

As Muehlebach (2012) and Ticktin (2011) point out, though, in the face of retracting welfare or the perceived suffering of others, care can also stand in for more transformative forms of political action, and within the work of food co-ops, this is clearly possible. Here, however, I argue that while some forms of politics may become eroded by the intertwinement of compassion, care and moral sensibilities, others may also emerge, however complex their form. The issue of food aid acts as a productive example as both food co-ops attempt to counterpose their activities and models of aid to those of food banks in some ways.

As I discussed in the introduction and chapter three, people can become the subjects of such 'regimes of care' through hunger and inequality (Ticktin 2011). Their status as aid recipients can also wound, however, as charity 'does nothing to enhance solidarity' (Douglas in Mauss 2002 [1925]:x). Instead, it has the potential to reinforce the position of the donor and recipient within a hierarchy of inequality. In Ticktin's (2011:223) work, she attempts to open 'the way to think about how we might care differently' rather than respond to the 'exceptional' and therefore legitimate suffering subject, who is often racialised or gendered; she suggests 'not making exceptions when it comes to questions of inequality, suffering' but instead working towards equity.

Here, St Hilda's practices are complex. Through the project's current funding, it is premised on the acknowledgement of inequality and need within the area. Yet, Jenny tries hard to reframe the forms of care and aid on offer, by acknowledging the needs and legitimacy of all to access food. Within the context of an area of London in which there are growing inequalities along lines of race, ethnicity, class and ability, this undoubtedly causes its challenges at times. Within each food co-op we see a complex interplay between the political imaginary of the food co-op and its participants, and the lived reality of austerity Britain. It is in the spaces between the two that tensions often arise.

At Fareshares, the collective's activities also propose a different model of aid in response to charitable giving. As Kellan told me when I asked about the nature of politics at Fareshares,

> It's a space where people who want to do something political with a small P that don't necessarily want to lie down in a road or hide in a tree or… I mean, a lot of what used to be what we did politically has now been taken over by charities so there's a lot of that and there's also been a lot of disempowerment because of the laws involving

> street protests […] So I think it's very hard to be a political animal and do something productive and so unless you're going to work in a specific project which might be more charity orientated when you give things to people like a food bank for instance, what Fareshares does is gives people opportunities to be political in a very different way. You are self-organising, so you are learning a whole set of skills. You're not giving things to people in a very one-way traffic basis and it's not based on pity or largesse or paternalism or anything else. It's not a hierarchy in that sense.

The model of equity and mutuality that Kellan refers to is clearly based on the assumption of relatively equal needs and vulnerabilities (O'Neill 2018:112). When confronted with severe disparity, as Alison was in chapter three when the homeless man asked for food, this can create conflicts between humanitarian compassion and activist ideology.

Since the Rochdale Pioneers opened their co-operative society 175 years ago, the co-operative model has captured many imaginations – including those of anthropologists. As Nash and Hopkins (1976:4) tell us that,

> Cooperative forms of organization are interesting for anthropology precisely because they are interesting for those who live them; they are relevant to a theoretical anthropology precisely because they are conceived in order to be lived. It is this element of willful (sic) control of one's own social forms that makes movements toward cooperative forms of organization an essential part both of the human experience and of anthropology's field of study.

By examining the imaginary of two food-focussed co-operatives in contemporary Britain, I have highlighted the ways in which this idea still captures people's imaginations today in response to a range of different needs, concerns and vulnerabilities. By exploring the social worlds of St Hilda's East and Fareshares, I have shown the complexities and contradictions at play within the model and its enactment. As I have argued, co-operatives are shaped as much by their histories and contexts as they are by their participants and the present moment. These contexts do much to inform their relationship to concepts of autonomy, ownership and authority, as well as their negotiations of politics, aid and care.

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